

Summer 1996

Volume 22, No. 1



205

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GAY COMMUNITY NEWS

The Mainstreaming of the Right

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

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Nancy Walker 1935-1996



Nancy Walker started working for *Gay Community News* (GCN) as a proofreader and then classifieds manager. GCN was the paper of record of our gay history, and helped tie us together before the first March on Washington.

She wrote a wide variety of articles and then routinely a column titled "Odyssey of a Unicorn." Her work was given a special place of distinction in Eric Marcus' book *Making History*.

Many people enjoyed her lighthearted chronicle of her life with her sother (significant other) which appeared weekly as a message from Porcupine to Mousie, Mousie Wildflower. In addition, she

wrote for *Bay Windows*, *The Boston Phoenix* and was V.P. of CHAT (Community Homophile Association of Toronto) in 1977-78.

Nancy fought breast cancer for 21 years and never lost her sense of humor, sense of adventure, or her willingness to love more new friends.

She leaves behind her sother of 33 years, Penelope Tzougros, as well as many dear friends.

Born in Manhattan March 17, 1935, she always thought of New York as home.

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© June 1996

Bromfield Street Educational Foundation

ISSN: (0147-0728)

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Correction: In the last issue of GCN, we misspelled the name of author Jeff Nickel. We apologize.

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Post Amendment 2: What's It All About, Alfie?

by Ann Holder

No sooner had the Amendment 2 decision been returned, recognizing the constitutional personhood of gays, lesbians and bisexuals, than President Clinton weighed in with a blundering and ill-timed announcement of his support for the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA). In the mainstream press, angry denunciations of the President's position by "gay leaders" alternate with discussions over the disposition of the "gay vote." It is tempting to be drawn into a comparison of net gains and losses. Is opposition to Clinton a vote for Dole? How will the g/l/b/t community express its dissatisfaction without playing into the hands of the Right—an outcome desirable to no one?

These considerations at first seem practical. But why at this point in an election cycle is the question of the gay vote relevant to a movement agenda? Of course in outrage, it is satisfying to respond with threats to withhold what the Clinton administration most wants from the gay community—money and votes. But how often does that strategy short circuit our long term conception of the issues we face?

Another way to consider the relationship between the Supreme Court decision and the president's statement is to look at the continuities rather than the differences between them. Despite the strenuous and inventive dissent by Justice Scalia, that sought to portray the Court majority's decision as a declaration of war against homophobia, Justice Kennedy's opinion is no clarion call for liberation, or even a brief against discrimination. It struck down a pernicious amendment, and suggested that "a bare... desire to harm a politically unpopular group cannot constitute a legitimate governmental interest."

The heavy representation of the Court's conservatives on the side of the majority, suggests that this idea was sufficiently enshrined in precedent. However, Kennedy chose to open his opinion, not with the accumulation of precedent but with a one-hundred year old dissent. Perhaps because of the historical coincidence of the "separate but equal" *Plessy* decision (May 18, 1896), Kennedy cited Judge John Marshall Harlan's dissent from the majority on that case, to the effect that the Constitution "neither knows nor tolerates classes among its citizens." Kennedy's citation reminds us that the *Plessy* dissent was written by the lone Justice who, in 1896, believed that racial segregation mandated by law was unconstitutional.

In 1996, Scalia's warning against placing the "opposition to homosexuality" in the same category as "racial or religious bias," confirms that 100 years have not been sufficient to convince all members of the Court of the principles that Harlan stood for alone. While apparently evoking the legitimacy of race as a protected category to delegitimize citizenship rights for gay and lesbian people, Scalia in fact attacked the principles at the heart of "equal before the law."

Recalling *Plessy* should also underline that the Court is a social institution, vulnerable to shifts in the cultural landscape. Mass. State Rep. Byron Rushing, speaking at a rally to celebrate the Amendment 2 decision, invoked *Plessy* to remind us

all that "the Court does not grant us our rights." In order for the Court's decision to matter, those rights have to be made vibrant by the activism of a social movement that challenges how homosexuality and homosexuals are viewed in the culture. Rushing's friendly admonition suggests the continuities between the Court's weak affirmative opinion and Clinton's willingness to play to rightwing rhetoric on family values at the expense of his gay and lesbian constituency. Even if we have access to the political process, e.g., to try to pass gay rights laws in the future, we remain vulnerable to the degree that we fail to continually challenge the ways we are positioned by the misogynist, racist and homophobic "pro-family" rhetoric, that continually pours out of the mouths of politicians of both parties.

What About Hardwick?: Conduct vs Personhood

The Court, at this moment, refused to follow Scalia's lead in placing homosexuality alongside, murder, cruelty to animals or polygamy as behavior deserving of legalized "animus" at the will of the majority. If that is so, it is in response to almost three decades of constant activism that asserted homosexuality was not a moral category. The Court's decision did not extend to a revocation of *Bowers v. Hardwick*, perhaps because the Georgia sodomy law purportedly attacked behavior rather than a specific class of people. Accordingly, the Court has pointed out a clear direction for the continuation of rightwing attacks, one reinforced by Scalia's dissent: discriminatory legislation may be directed at what homosexuals do, but not who they are.

Scalia's dissent even attempted to finesse this distinction in a remarkable passage, asserting, "it is virtually impossible to distinguish or separate individuals of a particular orientation which predisposes them toward a particular sexual conduct from those who actually engage in that particular type of sexual conduct." Ironically, Scalia attacked a distinction that has been most vigorously defended by self-identified heterosexuals who engage in gay sex "on the side." In doing so, he advocated the most sweeping definition of homosexuality by including even those who would refuse that identification. His dissent is marked by this ferocious effort to erect a solid boundary against all violations of moral decorum.

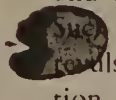
The opinion of the court made it painfully clear that the law has no way to distinguish between personhood and conduct, and no will to stop the majority from outlawing those who represent the possibility of conduct they find offensive. These conflicts will be decided in the social and cultural arena, where, as of now, the Right retains the upper hand. Clinton admitted as much when he argued on behalf of the sanctity of heterosexual marriage — an institution currently being used to bash unruly women, unconventional families, "welfare mothers," and whole communities defined as pathological because of their failure to mimic the outmoded ideal of the 50s nuclear family. Our failure as a movement to mount a critique of "the family," to seek alliances with others coming under attack, especially as we try to engage in the national debate

on gay marriage, imperils our future, even at a moment of limited recognition.

(Dis)analogy to Race

Scalia's dissent outlines the debate. He characterizes gay men (and lesbians) as a powerful minority sustained by the powerfully placed "cultural elite" (liberals and the Supreme Court). This is counterposed to the deserving, tolerant, but morally embattled majority trying to preserve the world they know through the democratic process. Scalia's strategy (the clear strategy of the Right) is to portray homosexuals as a different kind of person, seeking not just citizenship rights but special rights, seeking not only participation in, but control of customary institutions.

Fortunately and unfortunately, the uses of the *Plessy* case return us to the arguments-by-analogy to race that arose in the military debate, that are present in the marriage debate. For principled and practical reasons, we should stop using the racial analogy carelessly and attend to its complexities and dissimilarities. One hundred years ago, no one characterized African-Americans as a "powerful minority" engaged in a culture war. No one suggested their agenda was being championed by the cultural elite and driven down the throats of the democratic majority. Even in his dissent, Justice Harlan stressed the material "superiority" of the white race in all matters political, economic and social. The Court, in other words judged African Americans a (different) type of person; race was understood as a biological attribute (based on "blood," not skin color) and as a moral category. Biology was not a defense, it conferred inferiority.

Recognized legally as a type of person, who African-Americans were could not be separated from what race meant in the dominant white culture. *Plessy* was the climactic resolution to the white southern strategy to draw social lines that would permanently differentiate African-Americans from other citizens. Harlan's dissent, like the current Court's majority opinion, only held that second class political citizenship is unconstitutional.  a view gives wide license to the kind of moral rationalization, pathologization, and social differentiation that Scalia represents and that Clinton endorsed in his support for DOMA. Unchallenged by social movements, this position undermines the possibilities for political rights.

Following the Court's decision in *Plessy*, activist Rodolphe Desdunes responded to the political argument that it was too difficult and dangerous to publicly defy the moral meanings of race and the dual citizenship that segregation imposed. Countering the view that compromise with benevolent white, upper class interests was the best strategy for protecting the community, Desdunes replied, "it is always more noble and dignified to fight, no matter what... submission augments the oppressor's power and creates doubt about the feeling of the oppressed."

Laws will not protect us or our rights. Winning "friends" in high places by our dedication to the status quo, or to their political campaigns, will not provide safety in the years to come. Withholding or committing our votes will not ensure recognition of our humanity. We have the responsibility to create an alternative vision.

Ann Holder teaches U.S. history and is a long-time gay activist.

Make Your Vote Count: Protest Against Bipartisan Barbarism

by Scott Tucker

"Swarms of cringers, suckers, doughfaces, lice of politics" — to borrow Walt Whitman's timely invective — are once again demanding your attention, your money, and your votes. Every four years we are expected to bow down and worship that bloody idol known as the Two-Party System, that Golden Calf which thrives on human sacrifice.

You may be among the majority of American citizens who don't vote in national elections. That's a smart decision if none of the candidates represent your views; or worse, if they make you accomplices in their crimes. I am not addressing moral imbeciles here, including gay Republicans, but rather those folks who are thoughtful, decent, and distressed by the coming election. All of the "major" candidates, without exception, flatter fools, enflame fanatics, and practice lying in their sleep.

Voting the Lesser of Two Evil

If you have been listening to gay Democratic politicians like Barney Frank and Roberta Achtenberg, you have already heard the usual arguments in favor of voting for The Lesser of Two Evils. That is business as usual, and of course they protect their own careers. Yet discontent with Democrats is running high among queer citizens. A recent press release from the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) quotes one of their most admirable staff members, John D'Emilio, who cautions that the gay vote is not guaranteed to any candidate: "If the only two options in 1996 were to vote Democratic or Republican, the story would seem to be over. But gay, lesbian and bisexual voters have a third option: they can stay home."

Staying home is one way of voting against our anti-democratic political system. But there are other and better ways of making your vote truly count, rather than wasting it on Dole and Clinton or retreating into private misery. Until organizations such as the NGLTF show more fighting spirit against both the Republican and Democratic parties, they should give up the fiction of being a "non-partisan" group. In fact, they are often locked up behind the iron bars of bipartisan politics, and show no sign of making a break from jail. For this reason, my lover and I have withdrawn our previous support and membership from NGLTF. That is the strongest way to register our discontent, and is consistent with our refusal to cower under bipartisan bullies.

There will be honest disagreements among decent citizens. And I strongly disagree with Ann Northrop, an activist I otherwise admire, when she gives us this vague and very bad advice in a recent issue of *POZ*, a magazine I also admire:

So my Pollyanna-ish, can't we all get along conclusion is that we need to get a little more sophisticated and acknowledge that on AIDS and on issues of concern to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered communities, Clinton has a mixed record — some of it amazingly good, and some of it stomach-churningly bad. Can't we all agree on that? And can't we continue to appreciate the good and complain like hell about the bad? Let's stick to the issues and avoid the crappy infighting.

Let's Fight It Out

No, we can't agree, and we'll just have to fight this out. If we really "stick to the issues," then nothing in Clinton's record is "amazingly good." Clinton has not made a single truly brave move in any progressive direction. Typically, Clinton quotes Martin Luther King, Jr., and proceeds to destroy affirmative action. Clinton has moved rapidly to the right on many crucial issues and public policies. By any decent standard of social solidarity he fails on all crucial scores. I agree with Barbara Ehrenreich, who wrote this warning and reminder last year in *Z Magazine*:

The Clinton administration turned out to be a growth medium for the maniacal right and a temporary anesthetic for the left. I'm not convinced that a second Bush administration would have been a whole lot worse. I am convinced that we have our own work to do — more than we can reasonably handle — and that toadying to the powerful (whether called Democrats or Republicans) is not, and should never be, a part of it.

How long can we ignore the overwhelming evidence that Clinton is running as a Republican? And not as a "moderate" Republican, either. Let's "stick to the issues," as Northrop advises.

The Issues

The death penalty. On this issue alone, Clinton lost my own vote. No one can argue that this is a minor concession to the far right. On the contrary, Clinton's ringing endorsement of the death penalty is a major symptom of the moral and political suicide of American liberals, who continue to vote by rote. At a time when welfare is under bipartisan attack, hundreds of millions of dollars in many states are spent building ever bigger high-security prisons. In fact, politicians of both parties brag that prisons give jobs to law-abiding citizens in small towns and suburbs — prisons whose cells are then filled with the poor and unemployed of the inner cities. The death penalty is only one weapon in an ever more aggressive war on the poor, and the disparity in its application is undeniably racist.

Health care. Clinton is inept at playing political poker. If he'd been serious about health care reform, he would have fought like hell for a Canadian-style single-payer plan. And then negotiated. Instead, Bill and Hillary's bright idea was to sell the shop to insurance companies. This was one of the most catastrophic actions of his administration. Democrats and Republicans alike must share the blame for wasting a precious opportunity for health care reform. We can argue about Clinton's "generosity" in regard to AIDS funding, but this is also a trap. I'm HIV-positive myself, and I'm not grateful to patch up leaky life-boats when both parties are aiming torpedoes and sinking ships.

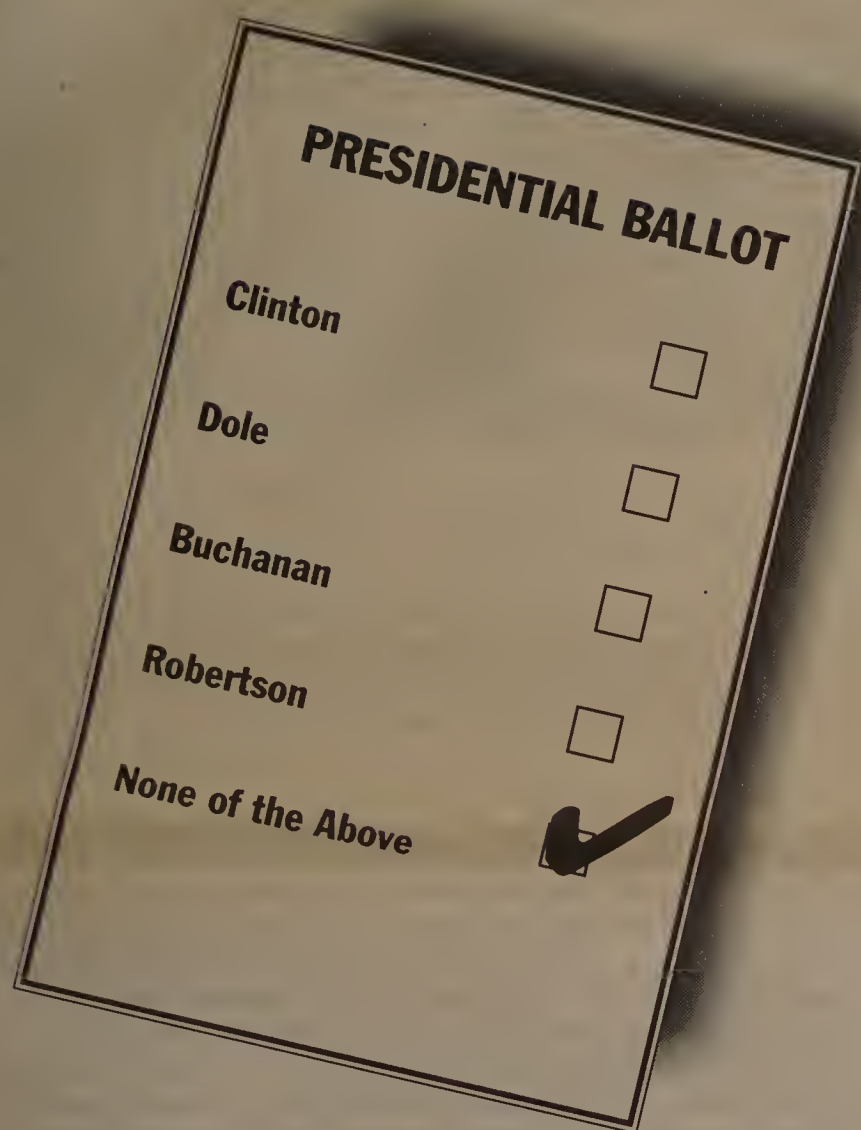
Welfare. Clinton wasn't kidding about "ending welfare as we know it." Here is a headline and subtitle from the May 19 issue of *The New York Times*: "Clinton Endorses the Most Radical of Welfare Trials. Wisconsin Experiment, Devised by a Republican Governor, Aims to Require Work." In an economy driven by corporate profit, we know what kind of work will be required — something approaching indentured servitude. This plan, devised mainly by Gov. Tommy G. Thompson (a possible running mate for Bob Dole) abolishes the federal guarantee of cash assistance for poor children. This is crude class war and it is contemptible. Will AIDS and health care activists dare ignore the iron link between health care and welfare for the poorest and most abused citizens?

Human rights for queers. Of course marriage and the military are rotten issues if we want to make the best arguments for liberation. Gay conservatives like Andrew Sullivan and Bruce Bawer often reduce our fight for equality to these two issues. Their sexist assumptions and ruling class loyalties can be quite breathtaking. They are not my leaders, to put it kindly. But neither is Clinton, nor anyone who insists we owe him our votes.

During the Vietnam war, the FBI was on my tail for draft resistance, so I was not charmed when the last National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights turned (in large part) into a flag-waving military parade. And as an independent democratic socialist, I don't believe anyone should be forced to choose marriage in order to be fed, clothed, housed, healed, and loved. But we are now stuck with a firestorm of reaction around these very issues of military service and equality of kinship. Clinton and the great majority of Democrats — through their cowardice, evasion, and outright collaboration with right wing initiatives — have further confused these issues and endangered our rights and our lives. Michael D. McCurry, the White House press secretary, said "the President believes that marriage as an institution ought to be reserved for a union between one man and one woman." Paraphrasing McCurry, *The New York Times* of May 16 added, "the White House was having trouble enough preserving health and medical benefits for those now covered by them without trying to extend them to same sex partners." Read that last sentence again. Carefully.

Whatever we may think of traditional marriage, it should be open to gay citizens, as they do or do not choose. Health insurance is one way I benefit directly from a domestic partnership clause at my lover's Ivy League university, but I also know this is hardly a model for national health care. If the Democrats were endorsing policies forbidding marriage between Jews and Christians or between blacks and whites, no decent citizen would cast a vote for such demagogues. Then we would not be having this debate.

Why do the majority of "liberals," "progressives," and even "leftists" dismiss the rights and lives of queers as brutally as the Democratic and Republican parties do? In great part, because we ourselves are so sunk in moral and political



"Fight the Right" is a not a good slogan if it is used to bludgeon us into submission whenever we dare to fight bigots and enemies outside the Republican Party and the Christian Coalition.

degradation that we accept the hatred, contempt, or indifference of politicians, neighbors, and even our own families. We ourselves throw away our right to vote on politicians who use our votes to deny our rights. Until we make our votes a lot more expensive for politicians, and demand greater solidarity from those nearest and dearest to us, we are truly lost in the American wilderness.

Where's the Left?

For the sake of real democracy, we should sign petitions to gain ballot status for independent parties and candidates. We should fight for radical campaign finance reform and proportional representation, without which we can never create a democratic electoral system. Alas, no self-respecting feminist or queer should cast a vote for Ralph Nader, the Green Party's presidential candidate, who has turned his back on his party's own platform, and who dismisses reproductive rights and gay rights as "gonadal politics."

Nader really has no clue, while Buchanan is out there winning hearts and minds by talking about economics and sexual politics. Not either/or, but both. In this strategic sense, the right is right and the left is wrong. The far right may or may not take full power, but they have already driven the "center" of bipartisan politics ever further towards barbarism. In a recent editorial in *The Progressive* criticizing Nader and the left, Matthew Rothschild wrote, "We must confront the far right at the point of attack." Precisely, and how bitter it is that so few "progressive" straight white men on the left stand up to say so!

Do you insist upon positive and practical suggestions after so much bad news? First we must face reality before we can make the good news ourselves. "Fight the Right" is a not a good slogan if it is used to bludgeon us into submission whenever we dare to fight bigots and enemies outside the Republican Party and the Christian Coalition. There is a way out of two-party prison system, but it won't be easy. So the next time you hear the drumbeat to Get Out the Vote, find a nice quiet place to think for yourself.

It's A Raw Fuck

When someone spits in your face, don't pretend it's rain. If gay Democrats want to argue that voting for Clinton is the only "realistic," "practical," and "mature" choice, then they are really arguing that we have no choice at all. That amounts to a confession that our political system is anti-democratic, and that they lack the will and skill to change it. Bipartisan politics is a protection racket: the good cop demands your loyalty and threatens you with a beating by the bad cop. Democracy dies when citizens are grateful to cops and politicians who don't beat us.

When Clinton crooned, "I feel your pain," some folks swooned. Queers may be desperate for signs of decency, but we get a raw fuck whenever we look for romance in politics. If gay Democrats wish to argue we must vote for the Lesser of Two Evils, then let's have that argument. But please, spare us the sentimental speculations about Clinton's innermost heart of hearts, which is no more relevant than the contents of his stomach.

Remember, the Two-Party System is not an act of God. Even if the Founding Fathers had written a permanent dictatorship of Republicans and Democrats into the Constitution, that would only be a good argument for another revolution. But they did not. This simple fact surprises many Americans, and no wonder. The school system and the mass media treat the bipartisan system as though it were the law of gravity. It's not enough to be passively disloyal to that system. At the local level, it still makes sense to vote for a few decent Democrats in order to stop Republicans. If we want greater democracy in this country, however, we can make a good beginning by breaking the bipartisan stranglehold upon the electoral system. Talk to your friends and neighbors, and on election day in November gather at the polling places to make your protest loud and clear.

Scott Tucker is a writer living in Philadelphia.

Queer Organizing in Kentucky: An Interview with Carla Wallace

by Ann Holder

There is a debate raging over the spirit and substance of "the gay movement." Who are we, and what are our issues? The conflicts are evident in the persistent questions over what to call ourselves. Are we gay? Are we some combination of the initials l/b/g/t? Are we open-ended and queer?

Are we really a movement? Or are we just a loose confederation of national and local organizations, service and advocacy groups, local newspapers and national glossies, all choosing their own issues, their own priorities, their own marketing strategies?

The problem with accepting this laissez-faire approach is it disguises the fact that resources of time and money are allocated within our overlapping communities according to the priorities established by the most powerful, vocal or wealthy members. And it bypasses substantive questions about what our future holds.

Queer people are still fighting for equal rights and equal access to public space. Our rights to employment, housing safety, family choices and sexual freedom are not assured. Nor is our right to educate other citizens about our varied lives, and our contributions to the heterogeneous cultures that homos inhabit. Moreover, those tricky questions of access and rights impact on all of us unevenly, depending on which and how many different worlds and identities we inhabit.

The following interview with Carla Wallace, of Louisville's Fairness Campaign, suggests that some local and regional groups have developed a working, practical approach to these dilemmas. As Wallace's discussion shows, problems that often seem stagnant on the national level are reanimated through the activism of groups like Fairness.

In the last five years, Fairness has created and sustained a broad-based educational effort around issues of sexual orientation, they have participated in a number of local justice and labor campaigns, they have participated in a successful economic protest against a major local rightwing activist, and they have started the state-wide Kentucky Fairness Alliance that, on the basis of urban/rural cooperation, turned back 13 separate pieces of anti-gay legislation in the last General Assembly. Wallace attributes their success in challenging the Kentucky Rightwing to the strength of the alliances they have achieved.

This portion of the interview, the first of two parts, raises a number of interesting questions for all queer activists. What are the stakes for local lesbian/gay identified groups in forming alliances within their community and how might those alliances take place? Is multi-racial, cross-class organizing particular to certain regions or settings? If so, what can we learn from that, especially at a national level? What should be the relationship between national and local/regional groups in formulating projects, defining "our" issues and distributing resources of time and money? How will we, as a "g/l/b/t movement" define community?

AH: How did Fairness start, was it in response to particular events in Louisville?

CW: We officially launched the Fairness campaign in '91 but it was based on organizing that had gone on since 1985 to get the city of Louisville to pass legislation to end discrimination based on sexual orientation. We had recently won passage of Hate Crimes legislation that included sexual orientation. We were at a point in the community where some of us who had done the organizing around the annual march, and other kinds of things assessed the situation and decided that it was time to relaunch an effort to win the legislation. The folks that came together represented a diversity in terms of political experience: some having very little experience or having only gay community experience, and others who had come from justice work either in the women's movement or the anti-racist movement.

Once the Fairness started, the whole battle became much broader than the non-discrimination ordinance. There was a tremendous amount of education that had to be done, speaking events that were happening all over. It really took off.



Fairness in the Annual March for Justice.

AH: What was your idea of how to define the Fairness Campaign and how did that impact the way the organization developed?

CW: The experience of working on the Hate Crimes bill taught us a few things. One was the intensity of the anti-gay response that would accompany a public focus on lesbian and gay people. The other was our ability to move something forward when it was a broad coalition effort. The Hate Crimes legislation was actually initiated after a cross burning at a black family's home, and lesbian/gay activists were very involved in the coalition that formed to pass it. The fanatical Right tried to slice out the sexual orientation piece, so that raised the question, would people stand firm and say, "No, we won't allow any of the groups to be axed out of this." And the coalition held. I think that was, at least in part, because there were key people who were lesbian or gay, who were working on the Hate Crimes effort and who also had a history in the anti-racist community. So right from the beginning, we wanted to build support, not only within the lesbian/gay community but also make links with the broader justice community.

We always feel like there is so much farther to go in terms of building a diverse organization. Louisville is a very segregated community racially, it is very segregated geographically and a lot of the justice movement/work is fairly segregated. People of color organizing in the lesbian and gay community, in Louisville, is still very much at its beginnings. It was only about 3 or 4 years ago that the first Black gay speak-out was held. So that is still very much in the formation stages.

Individual lesbian/gay people of color are in the Fairness Campaign, and in campaign leadership, but the Campaign is weak on racial diversity. I would say there is probably more diversity around class. This is an ongoing challenge for us. However, the campaign defines Fairness issues as inclusive of race issues and economic justice issues and women's issues. To that extent people see us supporting a larger justice framework that addresses more than one aspect of people's lives.

AH: I'm curious about what that looks like in practice. What kind of work do you do that sustains an organization that is seen as representing the g/l/b/t community, and equally committed to broader justice issues?

CW: We always look for those moments when we can break through the divisions, the mistrust, to make connections with those folks we feel should be our most sure allies. But those relationships must be ones of mutual support. Lesbian and gay people cannot assume that somehow it is o.k. for us to call on other communities to be there, just by saying, "this is a human rights issue." In our practice, we also have to be there on the issues that come up in the community around race and women's oppression, and so forth.

One early example of this happened when the United Food & Commercial's Workers meat packing union went on strike in 1992. Initially the justice community as a whole was slow in responding to requests for strike support. A representative of the Rightwing—not saying he was a member of the Right—called union members and said, "we're going to have a rally downtown in support of your strike." When the striking workers and their families got downtown, it turned into an anti-gay rally, with the speakers attacking Fairness.

A couple of Fairness supporters who are union people called us and said, "What's going on?" We immediately connected up with the union folks and they said, "We had no idea this was going on and this is totally opposed to our policy." This resulted in a big Support-the-Strike community dialog the following weekend, that included Fairness people coming down and bringing material support, and this led to Fairness people being on the

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Gay Tracking Conservatives

by Surina Khan

By a strange historical irony, the Christian Right and gay conservatives have something unexpected in common. For both groups, gay politics served as an attempted point of entry into the Republican Party and the national political scene. In the late 1970s, the homophobic right wing organization "Save Our Children" formed to repeal a gay rights ordinance in Dade County, Florida. When Anita Bryant emerged as the organization's spokesperson, she was pictured with Jerry Falwell and others who would later emerge as national New Right leaders in the 1980s. The contemporary gay conservative movement was launched out of another anti-gay initiative of the same historical moment. In 1978, a handful of gay Republicans separated themselves from the gay and lesbian grassroots organizing against California's Briggs Initiative, a state ballot proposition sponsored by then-state Senator John Briggs; Rev. Lou Sheldon, infamous head of the Traditional Values Coalition, was the state field director. The initiative would have barred gay people from teaching in public schools and would have allowed schools to fire any employee for "advocating, soliciting, imposing, encouraging, or promoting" homosexuality. The gay Republicans worked against the Briggs Initiative, but did so from within the Republican Party, calling themselves the Log Cabin Club, or Log Cabin Republicans.

Christian Right v. Gay Republicans

Since the 1980s, the New Right (a coalition of secular and religious organizations) has mobilized a significant popular base from which they gained access to the power structure of the Republican Party. With the agenda of the Right now enshrined in the Republican Party platform, it is fair to say that, in particular, the Christian Right has a stranglehold of the GOP, particularly at the local level. And anti-gay politics remain central to both of their agendas: On the eve of the Iowa Republican Party primary, the Christian Coalition held a rally featuring a pledge to oppose same-sex marriage. Every GOP candidate who attended signed the pledge.

Juxtaposing the emergence of "moral majority" politics with the Dade County ordinance and the beginnings of the Log Cabin Club with the Briggs initiative provides a powerful image of the relative failure of gay conservatism within Republican Party politics. Whereas the Christian Right is now a major player in the GOP, gay conservatives have met with considerably less success. As governor of California, Ronald Reagan provided a key conservative ally for the movement in its early days when he publicly opposed the Briggs Initiative (though it is important to note that Reagan waited until it was obvious that popular opinion was against it). During his successful presidential campaign and while in office, however, Reagan turned away from social libertarianism and toward the rightwing social conservatism of the emerging Christian Right, that promised to offer the GOP a resurgence of popular support. The "moral majority" politics that first brought gay conservatives into Republican Party politics are ironically what kept them out.

There is a tension intrinsic to gay conservatism between the dominant political ideology and the marginal social position of its adherents. Like their heterosexual counterparts, gay conservatives generally reject state entitlement programs and affirmative action, and are opposed to immigration. They

have strong libertarian leanings in that they believe in limited government, the "free" market, individual rights, and individual "responsibility" — values they claim to share with the majority of American people. Gay conservatives' values lead them to support the status quo, whereas their homosexuality means that they have a marginal status within that status quo.

Organizing within the Republican Party

Gay conservatives use two strategies to attempt to resolve this tension. First, in the case of gay Republicans, they work to convince the Republican Party that it needs gay votes to push forward its conservative agenda and that it should be a "big tent" party that recruits voters from the gay community — a practical solution that gives gay conservatives a place to be conservative, but does not necessarily address gay issues or resolve the tension. A second libertarian strategy seeks resolution through shared ideology — belief in the free market system and limited government intervention in personal conduct. Some gay conservative activists are clearly employing both strategies simultaneously.

But do these strategies work? While the number of gay conservatives in the GOP today is larger than ever, a closer look at the roles they play within the party shows that their successes have been mixed at best. Openly gay Republicans seldom win office, and their efforts to support straight candidates are not always successful — recall Bob Dole's return of a Log Cabin Republican (LCR) donation to his campaign last year. GOP leaders continue to look toward the Christian Right for support, and the movement's anti-gay politics have been incorporated into the mainstream Republican agenda. While gay conservatives don't deny that the policy positions of the Right are homophobic, they continue to work with the heterosexual conservative establishment, and often mimic its rhetoric. Rich Tafel, executive director of LCR, says the group's role is



An intimate moment between Ronald Reagan and Jerry Falwell

to make the Republican Party deal with the gay rights issue. Tafel's remark leaves unanswered the question: make them deal with it in what way? Whose politics define what the gay rights issue is?

Organizing within the Gay Movement

These questions of political ideology and strategy fuel present debates within the gay community. Gay conservative politics are identity-based politics. While identity-based politics have historically provided gays and lesbians with a sense of community and support, organizing around the interests of gay identities hinders the development of a strong progressive political movement. A broader progressive vision works to transform the existing structures perpetuating racism, sexism, homophobia and economic exploitation — all of which are directly related to the oppression of gay people. As well as being identity-based, gay conservative politics are assimilationist, with the underlying assumption that gays and lesbians earn the privileges of heterosexuals by being like heterosexuals, which means conforming to heterosexist norms. If gay conservatives are not interested in a fundamental transformation of existing social structures, including society's attitudes toward gay and lesbian people, and instead want to assimilate into society and preserve the status quo, can they realistically stop the rising tide of anti-gay Christian Right influence over the Republican Party as they claim? More important, what impact will gay conservatives have on the gay movement?

As gay conservatives have failed to gain legitimacy within the Republican Party, they have turned their efforts back to the gay and lesbian community. The contradictions inherent in gay conservatism (gay rights, and only gay rights, with gay rights defined as the "right" to assimilate) have been brought home. Gay conservatives have been extraordinarily successful in building a support base (primarily of white, gay men) who identify with part or most of the Right's agenda. They are not a fringe group and should not be dismissed as such. First of all, the conflict between gay rights as the right to assimilate and gay rights as progressive vision has been a part of the gay community since the homophile movements of the 1950s and the Briggs initiative of the 1970s. Secondly, gay conservatives both reflect and help to

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Going Undercover:

Bald-headed Dyke Meets the Christian Right

by Clare Lewis

I'm a bald headed dyke dressed in baggy clothes, unfamiliar with dresses and detesting high heels. Every person that interacts face to face with me sees the performativity of my gender. I carry this weight as I intentionally and without compromise perform each day. I subvert gender and sexual expectations once again as I weave another image for the Right. It begins with skirts, blouses, bras, stockings and gender specific shoes. I cover up with makeup, mascara, eyeliner, powder and blush. I finish with lipstick. My bald head is out of place when painted and primped in this style, so my wig covers this last visible remnant of me.

I wanted to talk, yet I was cautiously aware that my form of woman to woman communication was "unnatural."

I come from a long history of passing, where we as individuals clearly understand the gender and sexual expectations of society. Passing out of individuality, out of queerness, out of my gender, my now (in)visible self steps into a role with clearly defined guidelines and expectations. It does not take a theatrical miracle to pass, it is what has always been expected, and too often performed.

The car ride to the Feminists for Life Conference prepared me for my new persona and appearance. My costume of "normalcy," while foreign to me, was familiar and welcomed by those around me. An undeniable rush of relief and safety covered me. I was no longer "strange," I was "ordinary" in other's eyes.

Girl Meets Boy

I arrived at the conference, and as I sat down, I realized that I looked like every other woman in the room. We were all white, with the appropriate amount of makeup, similar sweater styles and jeans and skirts, gold jewelry and crosses branded our femininity around our necks. Our posture and personas were mirror matches, I guess I never forgot how "women" were suppose to look.

As I waited for the keynote speaker to begin, I felt awe that I was there, that I had walked in unnoticed, sat down and blended in, silent and clone-like at a Feminists for Life conference. I knew I smelled like hair spray and lipstick, and was conscious of crossing my legs under my skirt. Something tells me that stockings don't mix with unshaven legs, and that good girls don't scratch in public. My performance did not, however, end with appearance; it only continued into my interactions.

I had forgotten how to be a straight girl in a mandatory straight world where I must cross a competitive void that separates me from the other women I meet. I wanted to talk to these women, I wanted to understand how they placed themselves in this world, in relation to men, in relation to feminism, in relation to their bodies and my body and politics. I wanted to talk, yet I was cautiously aware that my form of woman-to-woman communication was "unnatural." My role as a stranger and as an outsider did not enter me into conversation with other women. Instead, my role as a "woman" entered me directly into the world of men. I failed to entice these young women "pro-life" activists beyond a few introductory words. Rather, Christian men sought me out, constantly talking over and at me. I quickly slipped into my "appropriate" gender role, just in time to smile, agree and nod my head. In this world, my thoughts were assumed to be their words, my smile and silent agreement gave this act license.

Identified as feminists dedicated to "life," these women recognized women's oppression, yet their solutions were rooted in an attack on my reproductive rights work and my sexuality, distorting the familiar word of feminism into an unrecognizable form. This feminism was not my feminism, a key difference being in our different interpretations of the meaning and performance of gender. I wondered how one can be feminist while still relying on and perpetuating the unbreakable heterosexual gender relations so apparent at this conference? What happens when feminism is reappropriated in men's defense, where traditional gender relations and power structures are key tenets in the politics?

Here Come the Lesbians

I felt shielded from the politics at the Feminists for Life Conference. I was there to practice being a Christian Right woman. I was there to study anti-abortion politics. Though dedicated to its defense, abortion does not fit into my personal experiences. I expected a narrow interpretation of single issue politics. I expected to pass safely and watch from the inside an abortion politics I thought I knew. I was grossly naive.

The first keynote speaker was a woman who had previously run an abortion clinic. She talked about the horrors of the abortion industry, about abusing young women economically, placing them in physical danger, treating them like objects, not the human beings that they were. Then she asked, "How did I find people to work in this atmosphere and go along with these horrible events?" Her overly extended melodramatic pause finished with one word: Lesbians. "Why Lesbians?" Because, she said, lesbians enjoy a working environment where women patients are mostly unconscious due to anesthesia; lesbians seek out atmospheres where they can exploit and molest

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Know Your Enemy

by Clare Lewis

As the anti-gay opposition to same-sex marriage gains ground, many advocates among gays and lesbians are confused. Why does the Rightwing, or for that matter the majority population, refuse queers at least the opportunity to represent themselves as disavowing the gay subcultures and embracing the institution of marriage? As Bruce Bawer, gay conservative, pines in a *New York Times* op-ed, "Isn't it wrong for the same rightwing activists who have decried gay promiscuity to now deny gay love and commitment?"

This, of course, is Bawer's project—dividing "normal" gays from those Others: flamboyant, flaunting, promiscuous, desiring. Bawer, like others, imagines that there is no difference between him and heterosexual conservatives. Because he can't understand the gap, he concludes that the opposition to same-sex marriage is irrational.

Why the gap? What is it that Bawer doesn't understand? Gay male conservatives, in particular, and much of liberal gay politics, most pointedly in the marriage campaign, bypass feminism because they are not interested in relations between men and women. But this means they are by and large not informed by feminist critiques of the family and gender. The issue at stake in the stabilization of the family (and why committed gays can't fit in) is the restoration of proper gender roles. Thus the issue is not simply the Right's hatred of homosexuals, but their commitment to a view of gender and how it is structured.

Right Living

My research into Christian Right and conservative politics revealed their commitment to a God-sanctioned, morally constructed biology of gender, according to which women's lives are not complete without men's leadership and men's needs cannot fully be met without women's nurturing, motherly nature. The existence of homosexuality warps this heterosexual design, as it takes women away from men, and men away from women. Between the Right's constructions of ideal women and men lie the "other." Classified as not true "women" or "men," gays and lesbians are expelled out of the "proper" gendered order. Homosexuality's outright deviance from constructs of "men's" and "women's" roles gives the Right something to define themselves against. Heterosexuals are heterosexual because they can pinpoint what they aren't — homosexual. This gendered view underlies the Right's pro-family stance and is key to both their anti-abortion and anti-gay politics.

The "crisis of the family" — the recurrent theme of conservative politics — is attributed to women's deviant activity (single motherhood, divorce, abortion) coupled with men's deviant inactivity (their failure to assert their natural power and leadership over women). When masculine leadership potential is displaced onto homosexual desire, gay men symbolically fail these leadership roles — a criminal act that jeopardizes the family. Equating the downfall of the family with the downfall of America, the call to a restored heterosexual masculinity is not only a patriarchal but a patriotic duty.

Christian Right Culture

Christian Right political organizations draw their sustenance from the larger, ever-expanding Christian culture. In the US today, one can step out of mainstream secular culture and become immersed in a Christian Right world. Christian newspapers and magazines bring information on a variety of events, Christian bookstores are filled with selections that offer readers subjects ranging from "How to Heal the Homosexual through Jesus Christ" to increasingly popular Christian novels, detective stories and mysteries filled with prayer. Then there are radio, news, talk shows, music and even long distance carriers and travel agents, and rock bands and comedians who offer entertainment with a Christian flair. The Christian Right has formed its own consumerist element for American purchasing pleasure. While they frame their existence as religious, this capitalistic outlet allows supporters to decorate their lives and themselves with the religious and political messages up for debate. While numerous single issue campaigns exist, this larger Christian Right culture maintains their interconnections.

Anti-gay politics has been a major vehicle through which Christian Right activists mainstream their messages. What is important here is that their religious messages no longer represent a fringe in US society, but their politicization into mainstream culture has altered US perceptions of the "political center," taking the issues of the Right into an "ordinary" realm. Their backlash to women's and gay liberation becomes framed as a "natural" reaction to social change rather than a carefully orchestrated political campaign spanning at least two decades. The effectiveness of anti-gay work lies in individuals adopting Christian Right politics through a seemingly benign identification with the "traditional" and "family" elements of our society that then produces an anti-gay (pro-family) identity.

The elaboration of a Christian culture saturated with political messages produces an identity ready for collective action. What is the problem? The disintegration of the family. What is the answer? To attack/punish/cure those who threaten the family. Abortion threatens women's compulsory motherhood, homosexuality threatens to take men and women away from their "man" and "wife" associations.

Where Are the Lesbians?

As I looked through anti-gay literature, I wondered where lesbians fit.

Lesbians cannot occupy the social position of "women" as crafted by the Christian Right. Lesbians are not "women" yet we are not signifi-



TIE THAT BINDS.

cantly included in anti-gay work either. While the Christian Right separately constructs ideal "women" and "men," lesbians lie in a limbo state, caught between the lines of reproductive mandates and anti-gay attack. Lesbians are "guilty" of non-procreative sex acts and separation from men, but their sin is not classifiable through Christian Right constructions of women as there is no space for women to be sexual without men. The danger of lesbianism lies in its ability to illuminate and defy women's traditional (non)sexual construction.

Class Lines

In a world where the poor are discriminated against for poverty and powerlessness, gays and lesbians are vilified for their supposed wealth. How does this work in America, a country whose mythical heroes pulled themselves up by their bootstraps? History teaches us the crime of poverty, and discrimination is memorialized in American legends that demonize the poor and prompt a capitalist rise to riches.

When is it a crime to be wealthy in America? When you're not American or meet the definitions of "American" as defined by those in power. Throughout US history citizenship has been denied to protect "American Culture." While the rationale for second class placement changes with time and targets (gays are immoral, the poor have no work ethic, people of color and women are biologically incapable), the end product remains the same: the respectability of "America" is a restricted zone of privilege.

While it would seem that economic success would indicate acceptance in our capitalist culture, gay and lesbian incomes have been inflated and vilified in the media. Gay and lesbians' perceived wealth is seen as unfair as its recipients defy American values. Gays threaten "America" as they take resources away from those who do fit this national construction. If the (un-American) poor drain their resources, the un-American rich steal from the family. As the American Dream dissolves into recession, financial success for the undeserving (un-American) is simply too much.

Racial Reconciliation

The fight against gay and lesbian rights coincides with the Right's move towards racial reconciliation, promoted by Christian men's groups like the Promise Keepers. Promise

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Lesbians Speak Out at

Beijing and Beyond International Lesbian Organizing and the World Conference on Women

by Rachel Rosenbloom

On September 9, 1995, twenty five women stood up during a plenary session of the World Conference on Women, unfurled a banner which proclaimed "Lesbian Rights Are Human Rights!" and remained standing in silent protest until United Nations security guards removed them from the room. Government delegates from 177 U.N. Member States along with several official observers (including the Vatican) looked on with varying degrees of interest and astonishment.

Four days later, in the same room, South African lesbian activist Palesa Beverley Ditsie addressed the assembled delegates — but this time from the podium, as the designated representative of several lesbian groups and scores of other organizations that had signed on in support. Ditsie's speech, like all official agenda items, was translated by UN interpreters into the official languages of the conference and distributed on paper to every government delegation. It was one of only a few dozen speaking opportunities granted to the thousands of non-governmental organizations present at the conference.

These two events — one a form of direct action rarely seen within UN conferences, the other the quintessential mark of NGO legitimacy — point to the contradictions that characterized the participation of lesbians and bisexual women at the World Conference on Women.

Putting [Sexual Orientation] on the Agenda

Never before had government delegates at a U.N. women's conference encountered such a strong presence of out, queer activists. For the first time, lesbian and gay groups (eleven in all, from Mexico, the Philippines, Australia, Canada, the US, and several European countries) were accredited to participate as non-governmental organizations. Every day, the members of the Lesbian Caucus — for the most part grassroots activists with little prior experience in the U.N. — met to educate each other on the esoteric and tedious process by which government delegates were drafting the conference's Platform for Action, a 150-page document covering issues such as health, education, poverty, human rights, violence, and employment. Throughout the conference, members of the caucus carefully followed the daily progress of the working groups, cornering delegates in hallways, cafeterias, and hotel lobbies to persuade them of the importance of recognizing lesbian concerns in the Platform, a document which will (in theory) guide national and international action on women's issues for years to come.

The version of the Platform being debated in Beijing was the product of several regional and global preparatory meetings. As it stood at the beginning of the conference, the draft document included the term "sexual orientation" in four different paragraphs dealing with discrimination. However, as was the case with forty percent of the text, the term was "in brackets," meaning that it had been proposed during a preparatory meeting but had not yet met with final approval.



During the course of the conference, as delegates resolved one after another controversial issue, the obstinate brackets around "sexual orientation" came to symbolize just how far outside the U.N. system sexual minorities remain (to the point that the Lesbian Caucus considered plastering the building with stickers reading "A [lesbian] was here"). So controversial was the term that the working groups repeatedly skipped over the four paragraphs in which it appeared and put off discussing them until literally the final hour of the conference: approximately 4:00 a.m. on September 14.

When the issue finally reached the floor a number of countries spoke out against any recognition of this "tiny" and "immoral" minority, with the delegate from Benin going so far as to say "We do not want this conference to go down as the conference on sexual revolution!" Significantly, however, over thirty countries spoke out in favor of the language, including South Africa, Jamaica, Barbados, Canada, the United States, Cuba, Bolivia, Chile, Brazil, Colombia, the Cook Islands, Switzerland, Norway, Slovenia, Latvia, Australia, New Zealand, Israel and the countries of the European Union. Although the Chair, noting that

there was no consensus on the issue, ultimately struck the words from the document, several governments entered formal statements declaring that they interpreted the Platform to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation whether or not the term itself appeared in the text.

It would, of course, have been a tremendous victory if the conference had reached consensus. Yet the debate was in fact as important for the opposition that it demonstrated as for the support: many governmental and non-governmental delegates who had previously been neutral or nominally supportive saw the vehemence of the homophobia in the room and for the first time realized the seriousness of the issue.

A Tent of One's Own

If the eleventh hour debate confirmed the outsider status of lesbian issues at the World Conference, lesbians and bisexual women at the parallel NGO Forum were, for the most part, right at home — just one more constituency demanding

to be heard in the cacophony. The Forum, open to anyone who registered on time and managed to get her- or himself to Beijing (no small feat, given the costs involved and numerous visa hassles), was host to over 30,000 participants representing almost every country in the world and almost every issue imaginable.

For ten days, Forum participants met in

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So controversial was the term [Lesbian] that the working groups repeatedly skipped over the four paragraphs in which it appeared and put off discussing them until literally the final hour of the conference: approximately 4:00 a.m. on September 14.

Beijing UN Conference

Representing Lesbians to the UN Conference

tents, classroom buildings, and (when the rain mercifully stopped) outdoors to discuss everything from women's spirituality to domestic violence, from the globalization of the economy to the human rights of sex workers. The Forum was not without significant problems: it was in many cases dominated by the English language and lacking in translation facilities; it was largely inaccessible to women with disabilities; and it was under fairly constant surveillance by Chinese security (who took particular interest in the activities of human rights activists and members of the delegation of exiled Tibetan women). Nevertheless, it was alive with discussions, demonstrations, networking, and activity.

In contrast to prior gatherings, lesbian issues held a central place in the Forum's agenda. The recognition accorded to lesbian participants was embodied in the existence of Tent T-46. One of the seven official "diversity tents" at the Forum, T-46 was formally designated by the NGO Forum organizers as The Lesbian Tent. At an event so large and so chaotic, with workshop spaces that were frequently double-booked, flooded, or otherwise unavailable, having the use of such a tent — with its concrete floor, steel frame, sturdy top, seating for 100 people, and multi-system TV and VCR — was an extraordinary opportunity for a constituency used to having its meetings relegated to hallways, courtyards, and borrowed space.

The Lesbian Tent served as home base to a diverse range of women identifying at lesbian, bisexual, womyn-loving, queer, single-by-choice, and any number of other terms in numerous languages. It provided a space to meet, to show videos (everything from lesbian and gay Quakers to lesbian safer sex to Black Nations/Queer Nations?), to distribute literature and share information, and to network. Perhaps most importantly, its presence at an international women's conference of this scope signaled to everyone (friend or foe) that the assumption of heterosexuality within the women's movement(s) will no longer be tolerated.

The impact of lesbian/bi/queer participation at the NGO Forum came not just from the Lesbian Tent but from the innumerable large and small ways in which homophobia was challenged from one end of the conference to the other. Rebeca Sevilla, Laura Flanders, and Mab Segrest spoke at well-attended plenaries; Urvashi Vaid testified at the Second World Women's Congress for a Healthy Planet, and Daphne Scholinski at the Global Tribunal on Accountability for Women's Human Rights. Only hours after a small fundamentalist march proclaimed "No to Homosexuality, No to Adultery, Family is the Only Tie," several hundred dykes and supporters marched the same route in one of the largest and loudest events of the Forum. As was the case in many other instances of lesbian visibility, the march met with a great deal of curiosity, a significant measure of support, and minimal hostility. Add to these examples the young lesbian speak-out at the Youth Tent, workshops on "Lesbianism for the Curious," lesbian health care, lesbian organizing, and dozens of other such topics, and all of the woman who brought up homophobia at one of the Forum's thousands of workshops or wore a "Lesbian Rights Are Human Rights" button — and a picture begins to emerge of the profound effect of

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Statement delivered by Palesa Beverley Ditsie of South Africa at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, China, 13 September 1995.

Madam Chair,

It is a great honor to have the opportunity to address this distinguished body on behalf of the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, the International Lesbian Information Service, the International Lesbian and Gay Association, and over fifty other organizations. My name is Palesa Beverley Ditsie and I am from Soweto, South Africa where I have lived all my life and experienced

both tremendous joy and pain within my community. I come from a country that has recently had an opportunity to start afresh, an opportunity to strive for a true democracy where the people govern and where emphasis is placed on the human rights of all people. The Constitution of South Africa prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, gender, ethnic or social origin, color, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, or language. In his opening parliamentary speech in Cape Town on the 9th of April 1994, His Excellency Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, State President of South Africa, received resounding applause when he declared that never again would anyone be discriminated against on the basis of sexual orientation.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes the "inherent dignity and . . . the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family," and guarantees the protection of the fundamental rights and freedoms of all people "without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language . . . or other status" (art. 2). Yet every day, in countries around the world, lesbians suffer violence, harassment, and discrimination because of their sexual orientation. Their basic human rights — such as the right to life, to bodily integrity, to freedom of association and expression — are violated. Women who love women are fired from their jobs; forced into marriages; beaten and murdered in their homes and on the streets; and have their children taken away by hostile courts. Some commit suicide due to the isolation and stigma that they experience within their families, religious institutions and their broader community. These and other abuses are documented in a recently released report by the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission on sexual orientation and women's human rights, as well as in reports by Amnesty International. Yet the majority of these abuses have been difficult to document because although lesbians exist everywhere in the world (including Africa), we have been marginalized and silenced and remain invisible in most of the world.

Sexuality is an integral, deeply ingrained part of every human being's life and should not be subject to debate or coercion.

In 1994, the United Nations Human Rights Committee declared that discrimination based on sexual orientation violates the right to non-discrimination and the right to privacy guaranteed in the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights. Several countries have passed legislation prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation. If the World Conference on Women is to address the concerns of all women, it must similarly recognize that discrimination based on sexual orientation is a violation of basic human rights. Paragraphs 48 and 226 of the Platform for Action recognize that women face particular barriers in their lives because of many

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Bev Ditsie

**STAY
NEGATIVE**

*For the positive,
I keep up my health.
I have bad days and very
good ones too.*

HONESTLY, I WISH I WERE NEGATIVE AGAIN.

There's a million excuses for having unsafe sex. Believe me, I used a lot of them: "I was drunk ... He hasn't said anything - he must be negative too ... I didn't want to be alone ... I was afraid he'd leave if I mentioned condoms ... We were lovers (after two weeks) ..."

You can't think HIV away.

IF YOU ARE HIV NEGATIVE STAY THAT WAY.

DON'T LET THIS VIRUS INTO YOUR BODY.

**Use Condoms Every Single Time You Have Anal Sex.
PROTECT YOURSELF AND END THE EPIDEMIC**

Please Do Not Remove This Poster. Ask the management for one or call 800.235.2331

**AIDS
ACTION
HOTLINE
800.235.2331**

Young Chinese volunteers were interviewed who said they knew from the Hite Report that homosexuality exists, and that they had learned a lot from the lesbian tent — that lesbians are humans and that repression is not a solution.

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this presence, particularly on women who had never met an out lesbian before (including, most likely, the majority of the 5,000 Chinese women attending the Forum).

Where do we go from here?

Lesbian participation at the Beijing conference was the culmination of almost two years of concerted effort by an international network of activists, beginning with a lesbian caucus that met during the Asia/Pacific NGO preparatory meeting in Manila in November, 1994. By participating in such meetings at the local, national, regional, and international level, and by making alliances with other constituencies mobilizing for Beijing, lesbian activists established themselves early on in the Beijing preparations as a force to be reckoned with. This unprecedented level of lesbian visibility was recognized not only by government delegates (some of whom are rumored to have started daily briefing sessions with the anxious question "Does anyone know what the lesbians are planning?") but also, as Tent T-46 made clear, by the organizers of the NGO Forum.

The Beijing conference demonstrated unequivocally that international lesbian organizing has arrived. What is less clear is where it's going. Significant meetings took place in Beijing — for instance, first-ever workshops on "Lesbians Organizing in the Global South," and on African lesbian and bisexual women — and critical masses formed around particular identities and issues. Yet many left feeling that there could have been more discussion of strategy, organizing, follow-up. It remains to be seen how the events of September, 1995 will reverberate through the various women's movements (queer or otherwise) around the world.

Rachel Rosenbloom works for the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC). She recently edited *Unspoken Rules: Sexual Orientation and Women's Human Rights*, published by IGLHRC.

Various documents relating to lesbian participation in the World Conference on Women are available from the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, 1360 Mission St., Suite 200, San Francisco, CA 94110. Tel: 415-255-8680. Fax: 415-255-8662. E-mail: IGLHRC@igc.apc.org.

For documents from the NGO Forum, including texts of all the plenary speeches, contact the International Women's Tribune Center, 777 U.N. Plaza, New York, NY 10017. Tel: 212-687-8633. Fax: 212-661-2704. E-mail: IWTC@igc.apc.org.

For a copy of the Platform for Action, contact the U.N. Dept. of Public Information, S-1005, UN Headquarters, New York, NY 10017 or find it on the World Wide Web at <http://www.undp.org/fvcw/daw1.html>

For more information about the Second World Women's Congress for a Healthy Planet, contact the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) at 845 Third Ave., 15th Fl., New York, NY 10022. Tel: 212-759-7982. Fax: 212-759-8647. E-mail: WEDO@igc.apc.org.

The MOUSE That Roared!

Mass Action, AIDS Action Committee's grassroots advocacy network, is now on-line. Join our growing network to keep policy makers informed and work for passage of responsible AIDS funding and laws.

By sending us your e-mail address, you will receive up to two action alerts a month via the Internet.

Each alert will focus on an issue the Legislature is considering, and instruct you to call or write your legislator.

Transform your concern into effective public policy aimed at ending the epidemic.

E-mail us at **stopAIDS@aac.org**. Make your mouse roar and make a difference.

**e-mail us:
stopAIDS@aac.org**

**AIDS
ACTION**

Questions: Please contact Nancy Marks, AIDS Action Committee at stopAIDS@aac.org or 617.450.1368.

Rise Of Conservatism In Its Various Forms:

Strategies From A Lesbian Perspective

Speech delivered by Rebeca Sevilla as the official representative of the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) for the United Nations World Conference during the Plenary Session about The Rise of Conservatism held in Huairou International Convention Center on September 4, 1995.

I am Rebeca Sevilla from Peru — and lesbians everywhere. I am also a native Spanish speaker. But today I speak English because not everyone has headphones. I want to speak about the ethic of diversity, which means to meet each other half way. So I will speak English. *Estoy segura que mis companeras comprendan el sentido de esta decision.*

Look at this issue through lesbian eyes. For lesbians, oppression has always been great. Lesbians usually live invisible, silent, secret lives. Sometimes lesbians lived openly — but then came witch hunts, concentration camps, electric shock treatment...and social rejection. Today we are speaking out. Not because there is less conservatism. But because there is a stronger women's movement. And a stronger lesbian movement.

Let's look at the United Nations' Women's Conferences. In Mexico in 1975 lesbians spoke out, but were criticized by some feminist sisters. Too many women were afraid that they would be labeled and discredited as lesbians.

In Copenhagen in 1980 lesbians organized informal workshops. A photographer caught some women sunbathing topless in a private garden. The photo became world famous with the caption: "les-

bians in Copenhagen." Should we conclude that all women sunbathing topless are lesbians?

Before the Nairobi Conference in 1985, because of the photo, there was trouble about lesbians attending. But the ILIS (International Lesbian information Service) was part of the NGO-Forum program, and for the first time the lesbian issue was raised by a Dutch Minister at the official UN conference.

Before the Beijing conference the same concerns emerged. Rumors circulated that lesbians would be refused visas. Newspapers reported that the Chinese were most worried about lesbians taking off their tops and kissing each other. Police women were supposed to be specially trained and issued sheets to quickly throw over any such disturbance. (We lesbians do actually like to take off our clothes, kiss and... but mostly in private.)

At this conference in China, we have our own tent — and have been invited to participate on major panels and commissions. Sexual rights have become an important issue in the final United Nations document. This is a positive story, a story of gain for the lesbian movement — but also a story of the conservative reaction.

And here? Newspapers in China and elsewhere focused on the lesbian issue in a negative way. Lesbian informational material in Chinese was removed from the tent. The European/North American tent did not want to announce a lesbian workshop; BUT the Cyprus tent invited all of the lesbian caucus to join their party. Young Chinese volunteers were interviewed who said they knew from the Hite Report that homosexuality exists, and that they had learned a lot from the lesbian tent — that lesbians are humans and that repression is not a solution.

The Analysis

This Beijing conference (the NGO-forum and the official United Nations conference) is about the political battle between progressive and conservative forces in all issues: human rights, violence against women, economic issues, the exploitation of women; education, health, development issues; reproductive rights or oppressive family planning. The question is raised whether the Holy See is just one of thousands of NGOs — or a major influence?

And there are also some conservative forces within the women's movement. It is not so easy to know these days who is conservative and who is progressive. More economic and political insecurity means more fear — and therefore more fundamentalism.

Women are at the center of the fight between progressive and conservative forces. Can we control our own lives, and our own bodies? Can we choose our own sexuality? The lesbian issue evokes tremendous emotional reaction and conservative backlash. Because it is (quite correctly) the symbol of women's freedom and independence.

So often we hear that lesbianism is a 'western disease' 'caught' by Southern women. But a look at our own histories shows that in all cultures and

countries lesbians 'popped up' every now and then. Today lesbian groups are active in all continents and in most countries in the world. It is not Europe or the US — but South Africa which has the most progressive legislation with laws against discrimination — and making it possible for lesbians and gays to adopt children. Nelson Mandela, the ANC and the Lesbian and Gay coalition worked together and understood that democracy also means fighting gender-apartheid and homophobia.

Most lesbians have to discover their own feelings in isolation — without information or role-models. Many lesbians reject their own feelings at first. In cultures where women suffer cliterectomy, incest, or arranged marriage, women have little or no control over their own lives or bodies. But still, we know, women love women everywhere regardless of social, economic or political conditions. And now we are speaking out internationally about our lesbian lives, our lesbian love. We are learning to be proud, not ashamed. We are learning to be visible and loud, not secret. We are not satisfied with a lesbian tent — we want to be included on the political agenda.

And Therefore The Conservative Backlash

Of course then we can expect a conservative backlash, not only because of the general rise in religious, cultural and economic fundamentalism, but because we lesbians are the SYMBOL of the battle between the sexes. The symbol of the independent, autonomous women. We do not need men. I am a lesbian. I have good friends who are men. But emotionally and sexually I prefer women. This makes some men, and some conservative political movements very nervous indeed. Because if women can choose to be lesbian, how then to control us?

Yes, it does also make some women nervous. Why? Because lesbians challenge any woman to think about her own choices and her own sexuality. How many of you today have been able to explore your own sexuality, to discover for yourself what you like or dislike? Young women, the next generation, can take this issue further and hopefully claim more freedom.

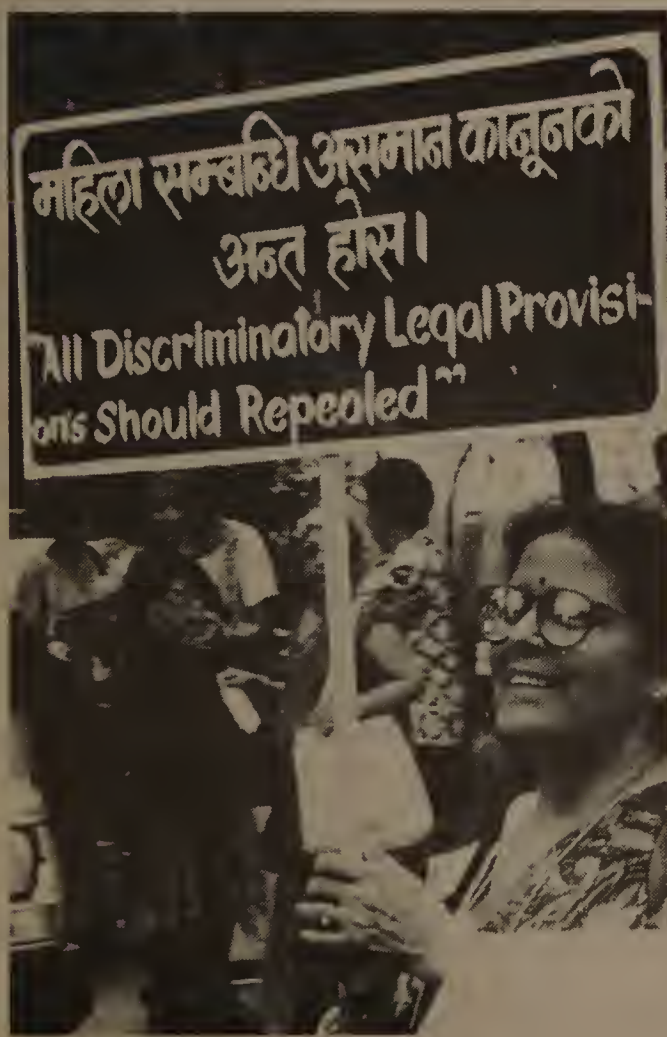
Solutions And Strategies

I want to ask all women and progressive men to realize that democracy should be based on respect for differences. Respect for different choices in life. Women's rights and sexual rights — therefore lesbian rights are human rights.

I want to introduce a new concept to you. I call it the "Ethic Of Diversity." We are all so different at this conference, from so many backgrounds. In order to avoid international conflict, in order to start solving problems in this world, we must develop an ethic of diversity.

We need to meet — but more than that, to get to know one another, to ask each other questions. We need to discover what we have in common, but particularly to respect our differences. We need to make the effort to meet each

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picket line in front of the meat packing plant, and so on. One of the things this incident taught us, was that when we don't have real relations with other struggles that are happening, we almost allow a vacuum that rightwing forces can move into.

Recently, there has been an effort to align some members of minority communities with the rightwing agenda. That has not taken hold in Louisville as it has in other areas, and I think that is because of our relationship with the anti-racist struggles. It requires time to build these relationships, and also having people there, working with other groups in order to make connections.

Kentucky Fried Chicken

So, for instance when we got a call that there was a problem with racism in the hiring and promotion of workers at Kentucky Fried Chicken, and that there was need for support on a picket line, we started calling our action network. People were down there and on the picket line the next day. The picket line was very much Fairness people and community leaders in the Black community —Muslims and Black ministers, a real mix of people. And in the middle of all the charges around racism at Kentucky Fried Chicken, an African-American employee, who was a manager, told her story of how she was asked to fire a gay man and had refused, and management came in and did it on her day off. So immediately there was this linking of homophobia and racism at Kentucky Fried Chicken.

It was interesting because KFC is a national corporation based here and it did get some press around the country. At least in a couple of incidences when the gay press would call us about what was going on, they asked why Fairness didn't go and sit down with KFC and negotiate a resolution around the homophobia issue. But our position was that it was not appropriate, that it would undermine the leadership of the coalition for us to cut any kind of separate deal based on the homophobia alone. Our concern was homophobia and racism, and unless they were addressing all of that, the picket lines wouldn't end. The Fairness campaign leadership was very united on that. It wasn't as though we thought we should end our participation because Kentucky Fried Chicken says it has a sexual orientation policy.

AH: What about the position of your allies? Do they ever express concerns about being exposed to hostility because of their association with Fairness, or of being gay-baited?

CW: At a meeting at City Hall, a labor activist who I had never spoken to before came up to me and said, "My buddies are asking me 'why am I down here with the gays?'" His response was that this is a worker's issue and if they can attack them, they can attack us.

In terms of Kentucky Fried Chicken, the issues of racist hiring and promotion of Blacks had been on the community agenda for awhile, then the gay issue was added. So divisions did not erupt, in part, because it was an African-American woman that had been asked to fire the gay person, who was also an African-American man. What KFC tried to do in their approach to Fairness was discredit the Black leadership. But that didn't work, since we have a long standing relationship with that leadership.

One of the results of our coalition work around Kentucky Fried Chicken was that people from the African-American community, who had not

addressed the issue previously, spoke before the Board of Alderman on behalf of the Fairness amendment. For the first time, a leading African-American minister testified on behalf of equal rights for lesbian and gay people.

After that, discussions did ensue among African-American activists, questioning our friends from the KFC work who testified, about whether they were deserting the anti-racist work in order to speak for the gay people. I think the struggle for how we define community, and how we move the broader justice agenda forward comes up in all the sectors working for human rights.

River City Blues: Gay Bars Take the Lead

AH: Tell us about the protest against River City Distributing. How did Fairness help build a broad based campaign?

CW: We were in a time period when we knew we were heading toward the potential recriminalization of sodomy in our General Assembly and Donna Shedd, the wife of the owner of River City Distributing, was becoming more vocal, more of a leader in the Republican party. And there were rumors, that were fairly well founded, that if the Republican candidate won the November gubernatorial election, she would be appointed to a post in the area of education state-wide. We were very concerned about this possibility.

There had also been information, by word of mouth in the community, for over a year that River City Distributing was owned by individuals with connections to the far Right. River City Distributing was the main distributor of beer in the area. It far outweighed any other distributor in Louisville. It distributed much more than just Miller beer, there was a whole list of products. There was an attitude on the street of, "Yeah, this is awful, here they are, coming in and stocking the beer in the bars that we go to, and then they turn around and are involved in this anti-gay activity." The concern about that situation was intensifying and people were approaching the Fairness campaign and saying, "How come nothing has been done about this?"

What really kicked it off was that the owner of the largest, predominantly gay bar in town, The Connection Complex, called Fairness and said, "Look, the evidence is overwhelming. Let's talk about what we can do." It wasn't like Fairness called all the bars, we were actually getting calls from them about the situation. The bar owners maintained a leadership role in the effort. The gay bars in Louisville had really never taken an overt political step like that. There had always been support for voter registration or events, but in terms of becoming active themselves that had not happened before.

So we looked at the situation, which was pretty overwhelming once we knew the extent of Donna Shedd's activities and organizing. She was a leader in the Eagle forum, and was key in the Republican party decision that the recriminalization of sodomy would be one of the first things on its agenda in the General Assembly. We felt like we had done our research, and that it was legitimate to say, "If you, River City Distributing, are connected in any way to oppressive activities of the Rightwing, then we do not have to buy your beer." We did not launch it as a boycott. We launched what we called an economic protest. The focus of our effort would be to educate people about the relationship and ask them to make a decision

about whether or not they wanted to buy the beer.

But before we launched the campaign publicly, we made sure that the coalition was not gay-only. Everyone was strong about that, the bar owners as well. Donna Shedd was also known for her anti-choice activities and her opposition to education reform, among other issues. We were able to bring in some pro-choice folks, a group called Kentucky Women of African Descent, P-FLAG and folks who had done civil liberties work. In fact, the coalition kept broadening throughout the effort. Once the coalition was in place, we called a press conference and bars canceled their contracts with River City Distributing. We also started a major leafletting drive throughout the community about the relationship between the Shedd's and the Right. So it was a pretty strong onslaught.

Miller Beer Organizes Against Protest

AH: Did you face any problems or opposition to the campaign, either locally or nationally?

Before the first press conference, we started feeling the pressure nationally from Miller beer about our effort. We attempted to be very clear that we were not calling on people to boycott Miller beer around the country. This was a specific local situation, it was about River City Distributing and that we were just going to choose not to buy the product as long as that connection was there. But we were told that if we moved forward with this that they would go all out to make sure that we were isolated. And, in fact, Miller beer launched an effort of contacting national gay and lesbian organizations, and getting them to sign on to a letter condemning the local actions.

Every one of the national groups was approached and pressured, by Miller beer. To their credit NGLTF stayed out of it, but a couple of organizations, in particular the Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund's leadership and the Human Rights Campaign, got very involved in leading that effort. When we got letters and when there was pressure from national organizations, including national organizations that some of us had relationships with, I think some (local) people felt shocked and betrayed. There had been no contact and then an attack was made based on no understanding of the facts. We felt this totally undermined the rights of local groups to determine their own approach to issues in their community. I think local people had almost a hurt feeling of, "Why are our national folks attacking us?" But also local people got so clear, about why we had the right not to buy a product that was connected with the Rightwing, that it almost solidified our efforts more. People stayed very committed to the our focus on educating the community about that connection. And the breadth of the coalition meant that there were lots of clear reasons for why this was happening.

What's Gay Friendly?

AH: So the coalition pretty much hung together despite community divisions?

CW: Those national organizations made a great error when they did not consult at all with local folks about why we were doing this, or what had led up to our decision on the economic protest. They pretty much signed on to the letter based on their relationship with Miller beer nationally. I think Miller made a misjudgment in believing that if they focused only on the

continued on next page



Gay nightclub owner John Scussei spoke during a news conference announcing a boycott of Shedd's River City Distributing Inc.

Wallace Interview continued previous page

role of Fairness and specifically a couple of Fairness leaders that they would be able to split the coalition and end the economic protest. But I don't think they knew how to deal with it being a broad coalition. They kept wanting to see it as a few gay people attacking Miller beer in Louisville. So, because they didn't understand the broad coalition effort, their attempts to undermine things really did fail.

Now, that's not to say that there weren't divisions within the community around this campaign—there were differences. I think one of the things that we learned was that it is one thing to go up against City Hall and say, "We want this legislation" and another thing to go up against a corporation that has unlimited resources to counter our efforts. In some ways even with the Kentucky Fried Chicken, people didn't get that bent out of shape because we weren't seen as the leadership of it. But with River City, folks expressed some concern about, "You're going up against a corporation that is a friend of the community, and how can you go up against Miller beer when it supports AIDS related work elsewhere in the country?" Luckily, because of evidence about the Shedd's rightwing involvement, once people got in a dialogue about why this was happening, it became clear that the River City situation was just something that was waiting to explode.

We also did get some attacks from national groups asking why were we attacking River City Distributing which was owned by David Shedd, the husband of Donna Shedd, when Donna Shedd was the target. That was another issue that was real tricky to deal with in the community, but people felt that if David Shedd was making the money that allowed Donna Shedd to do her rightwing work, then it was a package deal. Donna Shedd was directly benefiting. She had admitted that she had no other source of income, and that her husband's income was allowing her not to need another job and to spend her time, full-time, working on the rightwing agenda.

It definitely helped that the women's organizations were part of the coalition effort because when you have NOW and the Pro-Choice Coalition saying, "We support this action too," that was very helpful facing the question of whether we were attacking a woman—well actually, we were attacking a man for the woman's activities (laughs). But people posed it as sexist, the folks who were attacking us.

Sweet Victories

AH: What was the outcome of the protest?

CW: It was an incredible victory for the justice

movement. After about two-and-a-half or three months of the protest, and the community leafletting going on consistently, Miller beer dismissed the head of River City Distributing so that the company was no longer owned by the person who was connected with the Rightwing.

AH: Could you say something about the role of education in these campaigns?

CW: We always ask how can we use these battles to broaden people's understanding of the attacks that come down on lesbian and gay people? Who else is being attacked? So for instance we try and talk about why we support affirmative action, or other issues. People start understanding that the same folks who hate us, have a broader agenda that includes undermining civil rights in general, and the rights of other folks that we are allied with. Out of their own oppression as lesbian and gay people there is an opportunity to look at how this links to the struggles of other peoples. We've found that this kind of learning is a combination of the conscious, "let's have this in our newsletter or let's have an anti-racism training," and also about putting people in situations where they are shoulder to shoulder with our allies, people facing racist attacks or efforts to undermine reproductive rights for women or decent wages. Folks learn by being in those situations and having to fight back together. Part of the work our volunteers do includes going to events that happen in our allied communities. So if there's a big dinner that's centered in the anti-racist movement, Fairness people will be there. That's integral to the Fairness work; it's not seen as other work. It's part of the community building, and we do try to throw that net pretty broadly.

In the next issue:

Fairness responds to the Klan in Louisville

The Fairness electoral strategy

Visibility and the campaign for a non-discrimination ordinance

State-wide organizing against the Right

Ann Holder teaches U.S. History and is a long-time gay activist.

Carla F. Wallace has been a community organizer in movements for social, economic, and racial justice for 17 years. She is a Kentucky native, and currently serves as the Co-coordinator of the Fairness Campaign.

Thanks to Madge Kaplan for technical assistance.

Bald-headed Dyke continued from page 8

other women, where they can do the "unspeakable" things that lesbians do. According to her speech, lesbians made the abortion industry possible through their desire for sexual deviance and an opportunity to prey on the innocent.

Why lesbians? They were dirty, dark, mean, menacing; they exploited young women, women of color; they performed abortion without consent, prompted by clients' boyfriends and parents. They convinced women to have abortions against their own wishes. She claimed that she could convince any one of us in that room to have an abortion, because it was a business, and she was a business woman, powerful over us all.

At that moment all the disguises and makeup in the world couldn't protect me or prepare me for her words. The dramatic pronouncement of the word LESBIAN caught me, targeted me when I wasn't expecting it. I found myself thrown into the generic population of wrongdoers in the pro-choice movement; lesbians, abortion providers, clinic escorts, and activists all had their part in the "abortion crime."

Why the lesbians? Her story would have been just as believable for some and unbelievable for others without this homophobic mis-characterization. What did this lie hold for her rhetoric against abortion? It made me cringe, and yet I couldn't locate anyone else in the audience shifting uncomfortably. The switch into homophobia confused, isolated, and reminded me, that my own politics that connect anti-abortion and anti-gay politics are opposed through the same connections.

Her message was clear. Beyond the obligatory retelling of her abortion experience another message resounded, There are no "good" lesbians, and these lesbians somehow were not part of the population of women. Lesbians were in an in-between state of criminal and deviant non-womanhood. Lesbians were a distinct entity, something so horrible that our title of LESBIAN said and explained it all.

Our crime, the crime of gender and sexual deviation, a not so simple escape from the heterosexual structure of the family. My lesbian labeled body left that auditorium perplexed at the attack. Confused about the message and characterization of lesbians as non-human, and certainly criminal. I rethought the Christian Right connections of women and lesbianism, of abortion and sexuality, knowing that never again could I underestimate the deep political connections.

Later as I researched I looked for lesbian bodies attacked through anti-gay propaganda. I saw very few women, mainly anti-gay attacks focused on men. Why did I experience anti-lesbianism so passionately in anti-abortion gatherings and not in their anti-gay work? Where was my face in the anti-gay attacks, why was my identity criminalized on an anti-abortion platform? Today I do not attempt to shield myself from anti-abortion political attack, and I will always remember the word LESBIAN echoing through the auditorium as I was forced to deal with anti-abortion and anti-gay politics as one.

Clare Lewis recently finished her undergraduate thesis on the Christian Right.

factors, including sexual orientation. However, the term "sexual orientation" is currently in brackets. If these words are omitted from the relevant paragraphs, the Platform for Action will stand as one more symbol of the discrimination that lesbians face, and of the lack of recognition of our very existence.

No woman can determine the direction of her own life without the ability to determine her sexuality. Sexuality is an integral, deeply ingrained part of every human being's life and should not be subject to debate or coercion. Anyone who is truly committed to women's human rights must recognize that every woman has the right to determine her sexuality free of discrimination and oppression.

I urge you to make this a conference for all women, regardless of their sexual orientation, and to recognize in the Platform for Action that lesbian rights are women's rights and that women's rights are universal, inalienable, and indivisible human rights. I urge you to remove the brackets from sexual orientation. Thank you.

Palesa Beverley Ditsie lives in Soweto, South Africa. She is co-chair of Gays and Lesbians of Witwatersrand (GLOW).

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other half way and learn from each other. The ethic of diversity is different from religious ethics or political values which we hear so much about. Because the ethic of diversity does not claim one truth, but aims to deal with differences. To respect and accept.

The daily practice of this ethic means that we build networks and organizations which include everyone: indigenous women, western women, straights, lesbians, bisexuals, women with visible or invisible disabilities, migrants or refugees, rich women or poor women, women with AIDS — in fact any of us. An ethic of diversity means building a culture of respect. That is a rich culture which will allow us to find new solutions to old problems. New solutions based on agreement and peace, not on fights.

The ethic of diversity is a strong strategy to stop conservatism, because conservatism is based on fear, on greed and on divisions between people. Developing an ethic of diversity and especially a daily practice of it is our challenge. But I want to share with you something which worries me. Too many religions and political or economic systems preach freedom, but practice oppression. The women's movement too sometimes shows seeds of intolerance, jealousy and disrespect.

What can you do? If you are a teacher, talk about sexual diversity and different lifestyles. If you are a health worker, don't assume that everyone is only heterosexual, ask me whether men or contraceptives are relevant topics for me... If you are working on human rights, work on the issue of women's rights and lesbian rights and violence. If you are working with the media, include realistic reports about various aspects of lesbian life. If you are a lesbian come out and speak out. And make a link with others, with other diversity issues. Lesbians have multiple identities. If you are involved in politics, fight this week, and in your own country to insure that sexual rights are part of any constitution and that local, national and international laws fight against homophobia — instead of supporting it.

If you are interested join our LESBIAN PARADE tomorrow, Tuesday, September 5th starting at 11:15 outside this international convention center. Of course this last strategy will not stop all conservatism — but I'm sure you will enjoy it....

But remember, we don't want a tent or a parade — we want sexual rights in all political documents and in their practice not only for lesbians, but for all women from all over the world.. Thank you! Gracias!

Rebeca Sevilla lives in Lima, Peru. She is the former co-secretary general of the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA).

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Keepers' parables tell stories of Black men who learn to overcome resentment and see white men as "brothers," while white men learn to appreciate how much people of color do for them. Under their God, race is depoliticized and simplified as an issue easily overcome by individual men. While the Right has not supported civil rights previously, we now see (white defined) racial reconciliation being used to legitimate a "pro-civil rights," anti-gay stance. Under the Right's ideology of racial reconciliation, political responsibility for racism is waived as it is preached that only God, (not legislation or courts) will be able to overturn racism. This concept is strikingly close to assimilation as it creates unity by dissolving race into Christianity. Their concern about racial reconciliation "proves" that the Right is interested in racial matters.

In the anti-gay propaganda film "The Gay Agenda," legal terminology is twisted to produce the message that rights are only for morally legitimate populations. By rhetorically placing the "morally neutral" race issue in opposition to the immoral constructions of gays and lesbians, the Right continues to define their tolerance for difference only when difference is unavoidable and (currently) morally acceptable. Rights for the "immoral" are then framed as "special." In the ideology of the Right, only so many populations can attempt to live without discrimination, only so many rights can be legislated without disturbing the white, heterosexual social balance. Anti-gay rhetoric illuminates the larger move of the Right to deflate the rights of people of color and women in order to replace them with "Christian Rights." By co-opting the language of civil rights, the Right attempts to redefine who is worthy of rights. In the end only heterosexual Christian white men can live up to the moral standards set by this discourse.

Conclusion

It is not simply our promiscuity or our marital status that incites opposition. The Right formed these as issues targeting gay and lesbian communities, but this opposition involves an ideology inclusive of gender, class and race. Their definitions of the family and gender roles, of America and wealth, of race and rights are intertwined and inseparable.

While framing the Right's opposition to gays and lesbians as irrational may make us feel better about our social and political status, it overlooks the power of the Right's ideology that channels gender, class and race insecurities against gay and lesbian sexuality. Our opposition's ideology does not run in single issue ideas, and our political responses cannot be limited to such.

Clare Lewis did her undergraduate thesis on the Christian Right.

Who Did You Say You Are?:

An Interview with Riki Anne Wilchins

by Isa Leshko

Riki Anne Wilchins is trying to bring gender deconstructionist theory to the streets. Its not just a matter of putting theory into practice. To hir, the theory is the practice.

Identity Politics

Isa: In an interview with Cindy Martin of Transgender Forum, you said: "A 'gay rights' movement, whatever its successes, will have failed in some fundamental ways since it has been co-opted at the outset by the terms of its oppressors." What did you mean by this statement?

Riki: We are waging an entire movement based on the fact that we are homosexuals or transexuals when these terms are essentially diagnostic categories thought of by Havelock Ellis. Straight society invented labels to stigmatize and marginalize identities based on what one does with ones body. As Foucault says, prior to the 1800s there was no such thing as a homosexual. There were certainly same-sex acts, but it wasn't until after the 1800s that the homosexual had a name, face and identity. transexual is a name that doctors decided to create for something that occurred between my legs. I also had a rhinoplasty, so I suppose that means that I also have a rhino identity disorder, whose treatment is to live full time for one year with a smaller nose. Its ridiculous isn't it? Yet because I went for a dick job, I have a gender identity disorder. It would be funny if it wasn't so serious.....I'm also still uncertain how it is that where somebody parks their genitals for the night becomes the fundamental basis for their primary social identity. I may be gay, but is that all I am? Is that all I want to be? Does that really describe me?

And I'm still not sure what happens when someone wants to screw me. Does that make them gay or lesbian or bisexual or trisexual?...A lot of lesbians sleep with men, what does that make them? One lesbian friend recently said to me, "I'm thinking of breaking up with Gene because he started hormones and people think hes a guy. I don't want to be taken for a straight couple. Am I still a lesbian?" So I asked, "Why do you care?" She said, "Because now I'm invisible. I'm very proud of my lesbian identity."

But the problem with trying to make an identity visible is that it requires you to continually speak for that identity. To speak ones name in public is a very powerful act. On the other hand, it can entrap one within the name.

Isa: In what ways has this "co-opted identity" diluted the efficacy of the queer movement?

Riki: The queer movement seems entirely unable to inquire how these identities were generated and what maintains them. There's a tremendous impotence in this community to look to issues of its own existence. This is because the gay community by and large is brain dead, as is the trans community, I'm crushed to say. The only kind of theory coming out of either community is now coming at such a high level of academic abstraction that it can only be followed by people in philosophy departments.

...What all groups do as they become philosophically inert is resort to the last best refuge: a rights-based rhetoric. Increasingly, all queers can talk

about is their rights— not that we don't use it in the trans community. It's a very selfish philosophy; it's basically "you got yours, and now I want mine." People should have their rights but it can't be all of what you are about.

...Before the Tyra Hunter demonstration in front of Marion Barry's office in Washington, DC, one of the people in our group called the NAACP and asked them to make a statement on Tyra, who was a person of color. They said, "This is awful, but we're not about gender expression, we're about race."

Rights-based movements tend not to go very far because they're one-note sambas. They don't engage the best in people. They don't ask you to look beyond your own narrow self interest. Part of the reason you don't see many demonstrations and other actions happening is that there's nothing to engage people's moral focus.

Isa: How would you restructure queer identity to be less constrictive and divisive?

Riki: Right now we have two cages for sex or gender. The rules are: everyone has to be in a cage, no one can be in both cages, and no one can occupy the middle ground. By being transexual, you break one of those rules, you go from one cage to another. But you still enforce the rule that you can only be in one cage or the other.

Wouldn't it be nice if we could open the doors to the cages and allow people to move freely back and forth? That would allow us to occupy the middle ground. This is what Judith Butler means when she talks about letting the boundaries float free.

The first step is to leech identity of its essentialism. By essentialism, I mean we have no choice (in who we are); we cannot change. For example, people say to me, "you're still a guy, you're just a guy with a vagina." That essentializes my identity in unpleasant ways. The second step is to allow for more variety. There are very few sexed or gendered identities to choose from. Even if there was a free market, we wouldn't be able to choose from very many possibilities.

The final step is to allow the boundaries to be porous, enabling us to change freely from one identity to another. If we do that, then I think we can still have identities but people would not be punished for going from one identity to another.

Isa: One common interpretation of this theory is that gender is a linear spectrum with the binaries of maleness and femaleness as its anchors. Do you agree with this assertion?

Riki: If we start talking in those terms, we have naturalized the concept that there is a binary out there and that trans people fall along it. Maybe trans people are actually at the end, and the rest of y'all fall along the spectrum.

Maybe gender doesn't even exist. My definition lately is that gender is a difference engine. It creates difference between bodies based on their reproductive potential. It's a pretty ridiculous way to look at



photo: Mariette Pathy Allen

Riki Anne Wilchins

the body. Butler's point is even more subtle. We assume that gender is the expression of what culture does with a sexed body such that bodies with breasts have to wear dresses.

But suppose that distinction is illusory. Suppose you turn it on its head and say sex is what culture makes of the gendered body. In other words, there is a culture that requires difference so it looks at the body and starts seeing difference. That de-essentializes sex and makes gender the engine for cultural expression (dresses, make-up) and explains why we differentiate bodies.

Isa: How can the queer movement transcend a rights-based approach?

Riki: We need to start organizing around functions instead of identities. Let me give you an example. It is arguably a fact that as many men are raped on any given day in the United States as women. But we do not discuss prison rape. NOW organizes around the rape of women, not around the rape of men. But if we're against sexual violence, why do we care on which bodies it occurs? If you're against rape, you're against it whether it happens on trans bodies, or on women's bodies, or on men's bodies, or on my German Shepherd. Sexism in the form of violence is wrong.

Over the last 20 years, we've had people like Tip O'Neil running Congress and the liberal left started taking it easy. We balkanized in these little communities so that NOW doesn't work with NGLTF, who doesn't work with HRC, who doesn't work with the trans community, and so on.

Meanwhile the right, as the party out of power, had done an excellent job in organizing around function. Groups like the Christian Coalition and the Moral Majority don't have a lot in common except several key issues, but they are nonetheless very good at working together.

We need to follow this

continued on page 29

May 20, 1996

Porcupine said her last new words.

Now Mousie, Mousie Wildflower
and all her friends will have to
reread "Odyssey of a Unicorn" and
remember stories about Nancy Walker.

ODYSSEUS, I LOVE YOU ETERNALLY,
PENELOPE

Older than Methuselah

New book reveals that those
who blur "man-made" gender
boundaries have been around
forever — and have even
been considered sacred.

Transgender Warriors:

Making History From Joan of Arc to RuPaul

by Leslie Feinberg

Beacon Press

ISBN 0-8070-7940-5

\$27.50

by Craig Hickman

Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to RuPaul watermarks a turning point in the transgender liberation movement, the movement for gay, lesbian, and bisexual liberation, and, indeed, for the liberation of all peoples bound by oppression, shackled to apathy.

Part manifesto, part social theory, part pictorial history, part personal narrative, part revisionist history, part philosophy, part revolutionary tract, part poetry, part reference book, part liturgies — all blood, and spirit, and fire — *Transgender Warriors* defies categorization as vehemently as the sex/gender identities unveiled and explored within its pages. No book since Toni Morrison's *Beloved* gives so much and holds itself so well. History becomes art, the political becomes transformative, the personal becomes universal.

Responding to the news about the Stonewall Rebellion, Feinberg, author of the award-winning novel, *Stone Butch Blues*, begins his quest, asking in Part I, "Have we [transpeople] always existed? Have we always been so hated? Have we always fought back?" In searching for answers, Feinberg chronicles a world history dating back to the Paleolithic period, and finds evidence of transgender, especially in ritual, on every continent on the planet. Feinberg argues that with the first division of society into haves and have-nots, the breakdown of feudalism, the rise of the Church, and the rise of industrialism and capitalism, the powers that be sanctioned the torture, murder, and oppression of all people who didn't fit neatly into male and female categories, and the roles generally associated with them. In this way, Feinberg makes clear the links between class and gender oppression.

Men, Women and the Rest of Us

Still, those of "ambiguous" sex/gender expression have led some of the greatest revolts in history, including Joan of Arc, "Rebecca and her daughters," a group of armed Welsh peasants, dressed as women, who, in 1839, led local constables and British troops in a revolt against turnpike toll taxes, and "General Ludd's wives," two male weavers, dressed as women, who led crowds of exploited workers in Stockton, England in 1812 to smash the looms and burn down the factory. In his exhaustive research, Feinberg digs deep and cross references texts from a variety of disciplines in order to lay bare an understanding of human nature in an



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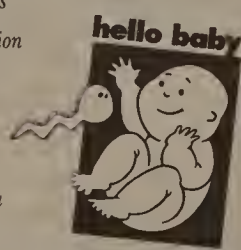
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evolving world that not only oppressed people of all sexes, genders, and desires, but also presented a history that suppressed transgender warriors and their contributions to making the world a safer place for all people as they fought against injustice and servility. As Kate Bornstein declares on the book jacket, "Women and men have had their histories. This is the history book for the rest of us."

Feinberg's chronicle of fascinating facts, events and interpretations is interwoven with a personal narrative that gives the book its razor-sharp edge. In Part Two, s/he describes hir restriction from foreign travel because s/he refuses to change her birth certificate to Male in order to obtain a passport that reads Male, so as not to risk serious felony charges if the authorities were ever to discover that hir sex is Female. If all this sounds too complicated, that's because it is; but Feinberg would rather fight the policy of having to legally align sex with gender expression than take the easy way out and secure access to other lands, a freedom many Americans take for granted. Feinberg relates the facts of this predicament without self-pity or sentiment. I, nevertheless, was pained by the sacrifices we have to make in order to move forward.

Feinberg never backs down from hir quest as a living, breathing, transgendered, Jewish, butch, lesbian activist. Feinberg carries the reader with hir on hir journey, highlighting points where hir research nearly dead-ended, or when clues for where to find answers seemed to fall from the sky. Consequently, *Transgender Warriors* reads like a good mystery; what s/he uncovers is mesmerizing, mind-boggling, revolting, inspiring, and always educational.

At one point, I forgot that I was actually devouring a book. I felt as if I was caught up in the epic sweep of a great documentary seasoned with the kinds of delicious insights and observations at which the film adaptation of *The Celluloid Closet* could only hint, but never actually state in its overly self-conscious, politically-correct agenda. Upon completing *Transgender Warriors*, one might view *The Celluloid Closet* as a film that, beneath the cover of examining the depiction of gays and lesbians in film, explores transpeople and transperformers — gay, lesbian, bisexual, heterosexual, asexual, or otherwise — and their realities in film.

Fighting Exclusions

Feinberg also never retreats from hir "communist" ideology as a member of the Workers World Party — that the world-wide majority of laborers have the power to overcome the divide-and-rule tactics of capitalism, fascism, and imperialism, but must first un-learn the patterns that perpetuate disunity and self-oppression. In addressing the current Women's and L/G/B/T movements, Feinberg doesn't just push the envelope, she tears it up. S/he takes to task some elements of modern feminist theory, posing tough questions about what makes a woman "woman enough" to be respected within the movement, and offering concrete suggestions for forging real "sisterhood" and unity in our diverse communities. "The women's movement," Feinberg offers, "has an opportunity to make a tremendous contribution by reaching out to all who suffer from sex and gender oppression... Let's open the door to everyone who is self-identified as a woman, and who wants to be in women's space... Together we can plot tactics and strategy for movement building."

"I am queer and Proud of it."

For the benefit of the L/G/B/T movement, Feinberg asks us to reflect ignorance back to its source, and not use it to wound ourselves. In response to a newspaper editorial which baited, "What do these people want, men in high heels to be fire-fighters?" Feinberg insists that the only correct answer is, "Any cross-dresser would know to wear sensible shoes on a job like that! This is gender-phobia and job discrimination as well. We won't stand for it!" She goes on to state that, "A timid denial that 'we're not all like that' only serves to weaken the entire fight-



back movement. We can never throw enough people overboard to win approval from our enemies. Should we try to argue that we're as 'normal' as those who organize against our civil rights? Forget it! I am queer and proud of it."

Such a recommendation stands as a welcome and refreshing antidote to the kinds of criticism some members of the community — many gay, white men concerned with keeping their ephemeral, pristine image untarnished — have launched against the transgender movement. Jeff Epperly, editor of one of the largest gay and lesbian newspapers in the country, pontificates in a recent editorial, "The move to lump 'transgender' issues in with the politics of same-gender desire continues in all its trendiness... Gay and lesbian community leaders should continue to resist the efforts of transgender activists to blackmail and threaten our community groups into taking on a burden they are ill-equipped to handle. Our issues ... are deserving of attention not muddled by peripheral issues." This statement captures Feinberg's assertion that misunderstanding, the lack of appropriate language, and an adherence to binary systems of sex/gender only serve to perpetuate all sex and gender oppression in this society. While some Doubting Thomasinas and Thomases may not always be ready to accept Feinberg's interpretations, conclusions, or recipes for change, it remains difficult to challenge the importance of the questions s/he raises, and the attendant consequences any search for their answers ushers out.

A Collective Achievement

The making of *Transgender Warriors* is itself a testament to the power of the many people who came together to assist in its publication. A cursory glance at the acknowledgments reveals that the book is a collective achievement of the transgender communities. There is a thirty-two page portrait gallery of contemporary transgender warriors and makers of history, from Quentin Crisp to Storme Delarverie (a Black woman with a masculine gender expression who toured with the Jewel Box Review as a male impersonator), who speak their truths and victories in their own words. The appendix includes selected listings of transgender organizations, publications, and a copy of the International Bill of Gender Rights adopted by the International Conference on Transgender Law and Employment Policy, Inc.

I could not close without making a remark about the extraordinary look of the book as well. Making wonderful use of historical images and photographs, many previously unpublished, Lucinda Hitchcock's design is visually stunning and metaphorically beautiful, giving the book the kind of flamboyant artifice a drag queen like me holds so dear.

Transgender Warriors is a seminal work, a must-read, a powerful tract based on the "crystallized resin of experience." *Transgender Warriors* is a call to arms for all oppressed peoples to bind together against a common enemy. *Transgender Warriors* secures Leslie Feinberg's place at the helm of the transgender movement. Ultimately, s/he cannot move alone. This magnum opus will swell and grow in your mind and heart, and, I dream, inspire action instead of reaction, hope instead of despair, and unity instead of division.

*Throughout this review, the pronoun "hir" is used to replace "him/her", and "s/he" (pronounced "see") replaces "he-she" or "she-he."

Craig Hickman is a drag/trans performance artist and Black gay writer who lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He can be reached at MojoPro@aol.com.

S/he takes to task some elements of modern feminist theory, posing tough questions about what makes a woman "woman enough" to be respected within the movement...



"Blink and the World is Entirely Different"

Truth Serum

by Bernard Cooper

Houghton Mifflin. 225 pages. \$21.95

Review by Sandy Leonard

Bernard Cooper has a reputation for genre-bashing. His first collection of non-fiction essays, *Maps to Anywhere*, won the 1991 Hemingway Prize for Fiction. His first novel, *A Year of Rhymes* (1993), bristled with the snap of non-fiction. So if his approach to truth in his new memoir is somewhat, well, casual, why be surprised? "I'll remember a situation," Cooper says, "and then try to write what the people *probably* would have said." Must a memoir be truthful? Factual? Does it matter if the memories it contains are "reinvented"?

Truth Serum is the story of a young man who grew up in a middle-class Jewish family in Los Angeles in the 1950s and '60s, son of a divorce lawyer and a housewife: escapades with school friends, shopping trips, adolescent crushes, failed attempts at heterosexuality, bouts with various therapies, an inability to come out to his father, AIDS.

Like most children, he once thought it possible to divide the world into male and female columns: "Blue/Pink. Roosters/Hens. Trousers/Skirts. Such divisions were easy, not to mention comforting, for they simplified matter into compatible pairs. But there also existed a vast range of things that didn't fit neatly into either camp: clocks, milk, telephones, grass. There were nights I fell into a fitful sleep while trying to sex the world correctly." Soon he's old enough to realize what it means to be a homosexual, "to invite ostracism and ridicule, and I would have done just about anything to escape my need to masturbate to images of men." He makes bargains with himself ("If you don't touch yourself till Saturday, you can go to Woolworth's and buy that model of a '65 Corvette"), but he's as out of control as the fire he sets to destroy his collection of pornographic magazines.

Cooper is a gifted writer, armed and extremely dangerous. Every page of *Truth Serum* gives evidence to an almost sacramental reverence for the evocative power of words, and his no-net approach to language is exhilarating, spectacular, much the way a fireworks display is—you hold your breath until the next glorious image blossoms onto the night sky, then fades slowly to the sound of oohs and aahs from the gratified crowd below. He's been known to spend hours on a single sentence before moving on to the next, an obsessive attention to detail that belies a visual arts background in assemblage (a mix of painting and sculpture) and a lifelong love of poetry. Indeed, some of the shorter essays in *Truth Serum* read as prose poems. "The Fine Art of Sighing," for example, examines precisely that. "It's a reflex and a legacy, this soulful species of breathing. Listen closely: My ancestors' lungs are pumping like bellows, men towing boats along the banks of the Volga, women lugging baskets of rye bread and pike. At the end of each day, they lift their weary arms in a toast; as thanks for the heat and sting of vodka, their aahs condense in the cold Russian air."

Cooper's skill with language can spin even a list of tricks into gold: "I met a truck driver with one tan arm; his vigorous kisses tasted like coffee; he held me with the grip of a man who watches cities slip past a windshield. I met an accountant who wore his reading glasses to bed; during nights of slow, methodical sex, the luminous numbers of a digital clock were reflected in his lenses. After purchasing seed packets at a Pasadena nursery, I was led by the owner to a house behind an arbor; his bedroom smelled of turned earth; his body felt as hard as mahogany." And of intimacy with his lover Brian (to whom *Truth Serum* is dedicated): "We

collided in bouts of breathless sex, and when it was over we fell away, sweating and incredulous, sometimes laughing at the sheer ferocity of our hunger for each other." It's because so much of the author's life had been spent believing he might never touch a man "that the sight of Brian naked beside me, beneath me, above me, has never lost its power to surprise. *At last*, a voice within me says, relieved by his proximity, grateful for his eagerness and heat."

His poet's sensibility finds beauty and awe in the ordinary and he invests the familiar (business signs, late-night TV ads for gadgets, the names of products or cocktails) with a magical, almost talismanic quality. (There are more brand names here than in any *Seinfeld* episode: Krazy Straw, Silly Putty, Orange Julius, Cabbage Patch Kids, Miracle-Ear. But with what respect he treats them, navigating their complex punctuation and capitalization—Band-Aid, CinemaScope, Jell-O, X-Acto—as only a true zealot could.)

It's no wonder Cooper loves this line from Provincetown poet Stanley Kunitz — "The end and the beginning fall into each other's arms"—so filled is his own work with an ever-present sense of life and death. His mother dies (unknown to him) as he's strolling along cruisy Santa Monica Boulevard in West Hollywood: "The night was warm, impending, alive, as if longing itself were an aspect of the air, like humidity or wind." Even when he learns the sad news, gentle memory softens death, makes it live: "Once I saw a photograph of a woman who had jumped off the Empire State Building and landed on the roof of a parked car. What is amazing is that she appeared merely to have leapt into satin sheets. Deep in a languid and absolute sleep, her eyes are closed, lips slightly parted, hair fanned out on a metal pillow. Nowhere is there a trace of blood, her body caught softly in its own impression."

Astonished by a Day-Glo shirt, his mother had once remarked: "They can do anything these days. Anything. I don't even try to understand anymore. You blink and the world is entirely different." Later, when AIDS becomes part of his world, Cooper is left blinking, unable to understand: "As for the rest of us at [the gym], the physiques we tried to strengthen and perfect became increasingly alien to us, capable of every failure and betrayal....And then the big blonde lawyer disappeared. And the lanky carpenter nicknamed Driftwood. The friendly incessant whistler. The limber old man who counted aloud. The boy whose back was tattooed with aircraft. Maybe they went to other gyms. Maybe they moved to other cities. Maybe they died in the night. One day someone awoke with a sore neck and the next with meningitis. Someone bit his tongue and it wouldn't stop bleeding. Blindness, dementia, paralysis. Anything could happen. Anyone might vanish. Fate took sudden, improbable turns, all of them unjust. One man, despite all the evidence to the contrary, was afraid to drink from the water fountain at Weight Lifter's. Another wanted to tempt the disease he'd grown to hate for robbing him of his friends, and bragged about fucking himself to death."

The title of the book comes from the author's experiences in 1974 with a psychiatrist who mainlined him with a heady combination of sodium pentathol and Ritalin intended to "reduce the frequency and intensity" of the his sexual fantasies involving men. It didn't work, this truth serum. How could it have? What does truth mean when "you blink and the world is entirely different"? When "anything can happen"? When every time he glances at his lover's body, Cooper feels "like one of those game show contestants who's been put inside a glass booth and given only so many seconds to grab at a blizzard of one-dollar bills. The clock was ticking, there were countless sensations still left to try."

Tony Kushner astutely notes that "reading Cooper is like reading Chekhov...his words instruct, ennoble, entertain." Yes, but maybe Bernard Weissman gets closer to it (in *Bomb Magazine*) when he says: "His writing has a way of making you freak out with glee about American English. It's erudite and gentle, then he squirts you with a trick daisy." And that's why each time I read a new book by Bernard Cooper, I hesitate at the last page, reading it over and over again, never wanting it to end.

At the close of *Truth Serum*, the author remembers a moment inside a sound-proof room at the Museum of Science and Industry, when he became aware of a persistent hum he swore was coming from inside him. "It was as if my restless, impressionable body had hoarded sounds since the day I was born, only to let loose with them in a room designed for absolute quiet. I felt phosphorescent with noise, like an amplified Fourth of July sparkler, sitting alone and emanating, or so it seemed, the rustle of my first blanket, the surf at Santa Monica beach, the ignition of every car I've ever driven."

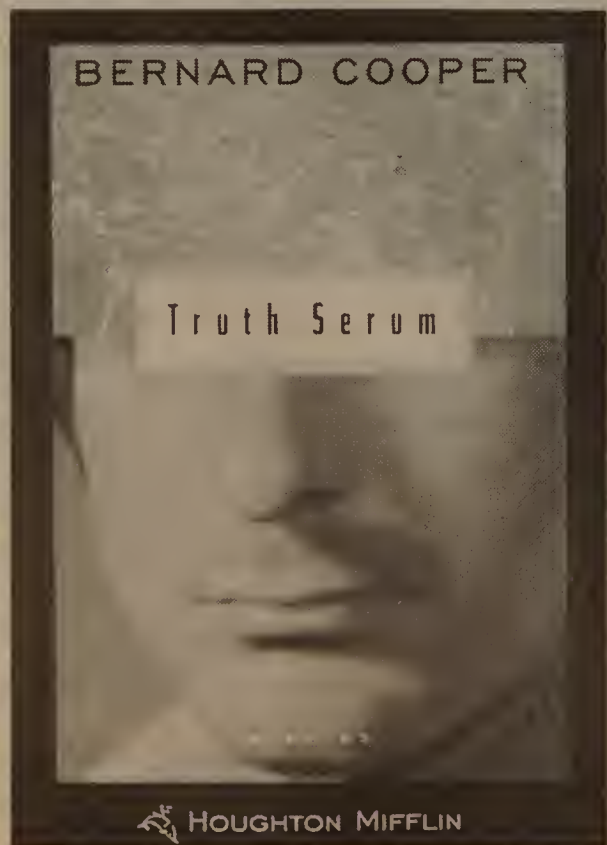
Wondrous sounds fill the pages of *Truth Serum*. I recommend its glories to you unreservedly.

Sandy Leonard is a senior editor at WGBH-TV, Boston's public broadcasting station.



Bernard Cooper

photo: Bonnie Schiffman



"Public faces, Private Lives:" Boston's Lesbian and Gay History Exhibit

by Nancy Palmer

Beginning Friday, May 31st, the Boston Public Library will host the first public exhibit of Boston's l/g/b/t history: "Public Faces, Private Lives." The opening was held on Friday night, May 31st in The Great Hall of the BPL, where the exhibit will remain on display for the month of June.

The public and collective documentation of Boston's gay and lesbian history began in 1980 with the formation of a group called Our Boston Heritage Foundation. This early group put together a slide show called "Our Boston Heritage," that chronicled "gay" life from the colonial era to the seventies. Through the years members of the group continued to gather information and artifacts. In the fall of 1994, a new group of queer archivists, architects, and others inspired by New York's l/g/b/t exhibit, "Becoming Visible," got together to plan for a permanent l/g/b/t archive in Boston. The exhibit "Public Faces, Private Lives" is the first exciting piece of this long-term project to collect and preserve Boston's queer past. Drawing on two decades of work by local and community archivists and historians, the group sees the exhibit, as part of a larger political effort to connect the l/g/b/t community of today and of the future with a sense of queer history.

PUBLIC FACES

In creating this exhibit, project members have been confronted with the problems and dilemmas that are necessarily linked to efforts to represent a l/g/b/t community and its past. How, for example, is it possible to establish a narrative that is coherent and accessible to the public without erasing or covering over the conflicts and confrontations of a movement and its members? How should community historians select the "pivotal" events and moments when those choices are contested according to the differing perspectives of the participants? How can public history deal with the tensions between the public faces of a movement and the private lives that shape and inform it?

One main problem the group ran into was how to challenge and destabilize the standard narratives and views of gay history; for instance that Stonewall marked the beginning of gay community and that nothing existed before Stonewall. This exhibit, by contrast, goes against common assumptions that the 1940s and 1950s were dreary times for gays. In oral histories, older Boston queers have talked about their closeness with other gay people in the 40s and 50s, their good times, and their sense of community with each other.

Sometimes the artifacts themselves brought up certain problems for the public history group, such as when members found an intensely passionate letter written by John Winthrop to another man in England. Artifacts like this one led to the problem of proving or interpreting gayness in old letters and photos. The group eventually opted for a broad definition of queer that allows them to include the history of same-sex affection in the exhibit without forcing everything into the modern framework of "gayness."

Members of the public history group have creatively addressed these and other dilemmas posed by the exhibit. In order to represent the diversity of the l/g/b/t community in Boston as much as possible, group members have devised ways for viewers to interact with the exhibit. Viewers will be able to write comments and suggestions as part of the display. The exhibit will also go online with the queer website Planet Q, located at <http://PlanetQ.com>. A computer terminal will be set up at the exhibit for viewers to tell their own stories and to interact with the "Queer communities of cyberspace."

This exhibit will mark the beginning of a multifaceted effort to connect the Boston l/g/b/t communities of today with those of the past. If you have anything to donate to the growing collection of artifacts and stories of queer lives in Boston, or if you would like to make a contribution to offset the costs of the exhibit, you can write or send checks to: Our Boston Heritage, 46 Pleasant Street, Cambridge, MA 02139. Don't miss this!

Nancy Palmer is an historian whose work focuses on gender, sexuality and work.

It's A Wank!

Switch Hitters: Lesbians write gay male erotica and gay men write lesbian erotica

Edited by Carol Queen and Lawrence Schimel.

Cleis Press, 1996. 191 pages.

Review by Sue Hyde

Gender curiosity among queers has become a staple of our subcultural lives. Dykes who cruise baskets; queens who want tits; girls who look like boys; and boys who look like boys looking like girls decorate the landscape of Queerville. Even presumably straight people like Dennis Rodman of Madonna and drag fame and Pat of *Saturday Night Live* play with their own (and our) genders. Everybody's doin' gender these days and many, like Rodman, use gender as a way to distinguish themselves from all others in the big marketing game.

But for us other queers, gender is serious business. We view it not as something static or rigid, but rather something smoothly negotiated, like a really good transmission in a really sleek car. Imagine my surprise, then, that *Switch Hitters* as an experiment in gender transmission barely registered as experimental or dangerous or even very daring as it wheeled from girl writes boy to boy writes girl and back again.

Not that it's bad born, or rather "erotica," mind you. The test of porn is in the wanking; this porn passes the wet test and the wank test. Some of it sizzling; some was merely titillating; a few stories were inexplicable as porn or erotica. The reader can feast on a range of sexual styles, from anal action to leather; titty twisting pussy licking to every possible kind of fucking. Sex slaves, rough trade stranger danger, bar flies, vampires, each with her/his own desperate needs, all to be satisfied to the reader's satisfaction. Each story is told by a person not of the same gender as the protagonist, so a boy wrote "I Fucked A Girl;" a girl wrote "Poster Boy," and so on.

But does the sex of the author make for hotter and more authentic pornographic voice or more deeply probing social commentary? The editors make much of the success of the writers gathered here and their ability to project "uniquely queer takes on sexuality and gender roles." But, some of the stories included were written years before we had claimed that brave new word "queer," and they don't challenge gender roles in the least. The stories that do challenge gender roles or include some very up-to-date queer subcultural elements are not hotter and more probing than any other.

The reader is a little bit hustled by this anthology, not in a mean or humiliating way, but hustled like the sports world is hustled by Dennis Rodman. Look at me, buy my book, see me in my feather boa, isn't my basketball playing enhanced by this hype? Well, no; Dennis Rodman in any other package would still be a very good basketball player and even for all his self-promotional gender-bending hype, he will probably never be a really great basketball player. And so it is with *Switch Hitters*: good pornography and good wanking, but nothing really off-the-charts, outer limits, mind-expanding here. Nothing here you can't find anywhere else, except the concept: girls write about boys and boys write about girls.

Okay, it was intriguing to think about what the author must have thought as he/she imagined herself/himself as the subject of genitalic lust not her/his own. Many a dyke I know fantasizes that she is a man, has a cock, fucks her brains out while totally satisfying her lover. Some butch dykes I know think of themselves as fags; not fag hags, but rather the genuine article: gay men. There are plenty of gay men who possess the sensibility of lesbians and can't keep boyfriends because they are "too much like dykes."

Did some of the writers of *Switch Hitters* cross those boundaries, living lives of psychic dysphoria? Had these queer writers crossed the boundary and fucked someone of the opposite sex? Or were all of them blessed with vivid imaginations? These questions fade with the realization that anyone who has spent an afternoon—or many afternoons—reading porn/erotica centered on genitalia of the other sex knows exactly how hot prose is phrased, paced, and brought to fruition. One need never have given up the gold medal in order to know every nuance of a blowjob or muffedive. Most of the sex in *Switch Hitters* is credibly rendered and most of it could have been written by, well, any one — queer, straight, female, male or trans.

In a few stories, the girl-writes-boy and boy-writes-girl thing visibly rears its head. Co-editor Carol Queen's ass fucking fantasy "Poster Boy" resolves conflict in what can only be described as pure '70s

continued on next page

Many a dyke I know fantasizes that she is a man, has a cock, fucks her brains out while totally satisfying her lover.

Hyde continued from previous page

lesbian-with-a-vibrator action. Queen gives us gay boy picture perfect, in every way, except he's never been ass fucked. Driven by his dilemma, he chats up his dyke galpals about it who, in sensible lesbian style, advise our man to consult a catalogue from a women's sex shop for two dildoes in graduated sizes. He buys the dongs, puts the hot sex tape in the VCR, and satisfies himself as no man ever has.

Then, in a story called "For Her Eyes Only," by Marco Vassi, our heroine begins her narrative by noting that coming out has involved three distinct steps. Something, I think, about close friends, then family and then a larger world? No, her coming out is actually about three different sexual relationships, each with hotter sex than the other. In her third and last "coming out" episode, the story's and our heroine's ultimate climax is attained through the use of a double-headed dong. Marco Vassi wrote this story for the "Penthouse Forum," under the name Valerie Mars, presumably to be read and stroked to — by a straight male audience. In the Vassi story, our heroine is finally satisfied by her girlfriend as only a man can satisfy.

In "Boss Lady in Bondage," a story excerpted from a novel written for straight boy strokers, Larry Townsend presents Ruth, a slave at a sex ranch, who unravels at the thought that her sisters in bondage have satisfied her as no man who has access to her body even cares to do or thinks about. Well, now, this is very familiar, right down to the plot curve that poor Ruth, suffering every type of unnamed physical and sexual humiliation at the hands of anonymous men, cannot quell her shame at feeling pleasure from the touch of a woman who shares her hideously heterosexual fate. Maybe the guys who jerked off to "Boss Lady" thought this was a really racy scenario. I could only read it as exemplar of its historical/cultural niche of situational lesbianism contorted by anti-feminism. Kinda like "The Bitches of Cellblock B" or whatever.

"Predators," by ex-GCNER Wickie Stamps, seemed a bizarre piece to include in an anthology of erotica. A grim story of hustlers, drugs and violence, it concludes with the rape and beating death of a prostitute who took one risk too many with rough trade. Or maybe the hustler wasn't really dead, but sooner or later he would be. The editors note in the introduction to this story that "Stamps

shows any man whose tastes run to 'trade' might swap...safety for the adrenaline high....," but after several readings of the story, real pleasure on the hustler's part eluded this reader. The story's title refers both to the hustler and the hustled, but since only the hustler is raped, beaten and left to die, this story is best understood as a cautionary tale.

In William J. Mann's selection, "The Pussy Pier," dykes in Provincetown do each other bayside; Pat Califia's "The Wolf is My Shepherd..." stars a gay vampire who just can't get a fuck or a suck; Laura Antoniou's "Brian on the Farm" ends on the note that, even at a sex plantation, the world is bottom

heavy. Kevin Killian's "Renga" offers a melancholic literary twist to a girl fuck scene.

Switch Hitters will be most interesting to those who, like editor Carol Queen, study gender subjectivity and perspective and harbor a fascination for postmodern identity puzzles or those who collect pornography and will want to include this book on their shelves or those who enjoy cross-gendered sex fantasies. For the rest of us, it remains a (mostly) reliable wank, nothing more and nothing less.

Sue Hyde works for the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. She produces the annual Creating Change conference.

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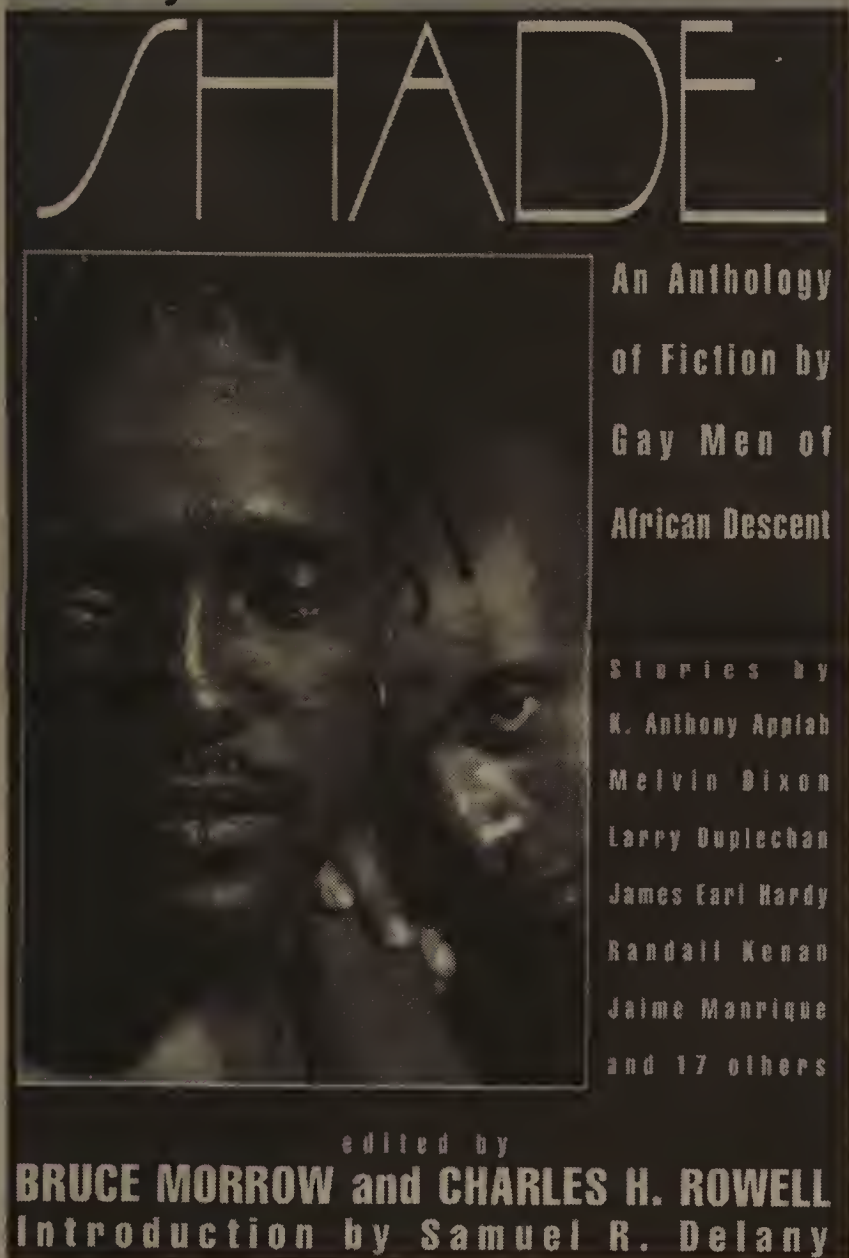
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Clearing Territory Within the Mainstream

Shade: An Anthology of Fiction by Gay Men of African Descent
 Edited by Bruce Morrow and Charles H. Rowell, Introduction by Samuel R. Delaney
 Avon, 1996. 348 pages. \$12.00

Review by Robert Reid-Pharr



That there is an ever growing body of self-identified Black gay male writers in this country who have made impressive gains in the publishing industry over the last two decades is indisputable. Indeed, one can almost discern the beginnings of a Black gay male canon: Bruce Nugent, James Baldwin, Samuel Delany, Essex Hemphill, Melvin Dixon, Assotto Saint, Randall Kenan, John Keene. The list continues. It is from within this tradition then that we ought to read the newest collective effort by Black gay male writers, *Shade*, a compilation of twenty-two short stories, edited by Bruce Morrow and Charles H. Rowell.

The work continues in the vein of Joe Beam's, *In the Life*, Essex Hemphill's *Brother to Brother*, Assotto Saint's *The Road Before Us* and the two collections edited by Other Countries, *Other Countries: Black Gay Voices* and *Sojourner: Black Gay Voices in the Age of AIDS*. That is to say, *Shade* represents a self-conscious effort to pull together a large body of writers whose work hopefully demonstrates the immense diversity and complexity of "the" Black gay male experience. At the same time, however, the work makes several marked departures from this already somewhat worn path. First, it pushes the boundaries of the publishing envelope by clearing territory for Black gay writers within "mainstream" publishing houses, in this case Avon. Moreover, unlike all its precursors, save Assotto Saint's *The Road Before Us*, a collection of 100 Black gay poets, *Shade* restricts itself to one form, the short story. The overall effect is a collection that feels more manageable, better put together, if less immediate and risky. What I find most

interesting about the collection as a whole then is the way in which one senses a certain tension, growing pains if you will, about what the proper form and function of well wrought Black gay fiction ought to be. On the one hand, there is a clear desire to demonstrate the existence and diversity of Black gay communities and individuals, to say, "We are here!" On the other, there is a struggle to demonstrate both real mastery over the craft and an advanced understanding of the subtleties of the human experience, Black, gay and otherwise.

"We are here!"

The most stark examples of the former tendency are G. Winston James' "Church" and K. Anthony Appiah's "The Pool." In James' piece, Langston, a remarkably accomplished young man comes home to small town, Black America and attends his family church with his proud and adoring mother. When he is called upon by the church's minister to say a few words to the congregation, to make an accounting of himself, he stumbles along uncomfortably until he finally lets fly the news of his impending death. He makes some awkward comments about his regret at not having children and then finally begins to sob uncontrollably whereupon the congregation gets taken away with his story while his mother in a fit of compassion announces, "That's my son! Oh, my God, that's my baby. Can't no AIDS just take my baby!" The story ends as Langston, wrapped in the ecstatic religiosity of his church family, cries aloud, "I'm gay! Praise God! Hallelujah!" The thrust of the piece is, of course, to demonstrate that there are indeed many gay people firmly ensconced within Black religious life and, more to the point, that there is room within that life for both homosexuals and homosexuality. The message is a good one, but one that has nonetheless been rather frequently rehearsed.

K. Anthony Appiah continues in this, "We are everywhere" vein in his story, "The Pool," a work that puts on display the highly rarefied life of elites in an unnamed Caribbean island who congregate around a pool club in the capitol city. Peter, a music teacher living in the States, is in the midst of one his regular visits to his native country. Making daily escapes from his family by arriving at the club early, he encounters Jamie, a tourist and the new love interest of his roommate and former lover, Jonathan. They flirt, then have rather predictable sex, all to the beat of Peter's paranoia that the elites on this island (the pool) might be tipped off to his homosexuality. The work gets clumsy after that. The author never actually resolves, or makes sense of his protagonist's paranoia, his fear of surveillance. Indeed Appiah becomes suddenly self-conscious and writes, "After sex (I've never known how to write about it, and the mechanics, after all, are always very much the same)." The odd thing is that this is the first time the reader has been hailed at all. Moreover, there was no indication before this that the protagonist was actually *writing* the piece. It is almost as if at this moment when the mechanics of homosexuality might be put on display, something reminds the author/protagonist that he is always being watched. Finally, the whole thing collapses into an unsatisfying bout of name calling in which Peter chastises Jamie for tricking (with?) him, leaving the deeper, more complex issues of community and belonging unfocused and unresolved.

Subtle Interludes

I would be wrong, however, to leave the impression that all of the works in the collection sacrifice subtlety to this project of demonstrating Black gay existence. Nothing could be further from the truth. Charles Harvey gives us a delightful story, "When Dogs Bark" in which his protagonist, Jethro, a barking, growling hick from Texas on an extended vacation in New York with his wife, Eartha Pearl, meets Toni, a white drag-queen, with whom he initiates a passionate and deeply complex affair. The story could easily have devolved into a sort of Beverly Hill Billies meets Ru Paul parody of itself. Yet, Harvey refuses easy answers and happy endings, sending Jethro back home to Texas with Eartha, Toni's sweet kisses fresh on his lips. Brian Keith Jackson, on the other hand, leaves the issue of homosexuality to the side altogether in his "The View From Here" a haunting tale, narrated from the vantage point of an unborn child whose impending birth throws her poor family into crisis. Finally, the child's distant and dictatorial father makes a plan with his child-

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Mirroring Apartheid: The Voices of Lesbian and Gay South Africans

Defiant Desire: Gay and Lesbian Lives in South Africa

Edited by Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron

Routledge, New York, 1995

376 pages

The Invisible Ghetto: Lesbian and Gay Writing From South Africa

Edited Matthew Krouse; Assisted by Kim Berman

Gay Men's Press, US edition, 1995

Review by Jo-Anne Green

"There it lies, then: the ground on which the District once lived for real; red earth of Table Mountain; empty now; an open mouth, wounded, and — as I say — screaming silently. And I know that even should this ground be built up again, this mouth will be crying beneath the new foundations. In fact, there is something quite final about the fall of District Six...(all that remains are) a few churches and one or two mosques. (And this Cape at which tragedy plays itself out, paradoxically remains the Cape of Good Hope..."

Adam Small

District Six, like Sophiatown and "Fietas" in Johannesburg were dynamic cultural meccas for South African artists of all disciplines, pulsating with life and, not surprisingly, areas where homosexuals of all races cohabited, were visible, and even celebrated. That was before Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd, known as the "Architect of Apartheid," commenced the violent erasure of the tangible fabric of District Six by instituting in 1966 the Group Areas Act, designed to erect absolute borders between the races to ensure that whites didn't have to socialize or be educated with blacks and to identify coloreds as more privileged than blacks. Its effect was to extinguish all hope for a multi-faceted South African culture. Ironically, Verwoerd was assassinated that year, the year during which District Six was proclaimed a "whites only" area. By 1968, the apartheid government began a program of demolition and forced removals. Those districts were razed for the simple fact that people of different races co-mingled there; and because these communities were more tolerant of the "other," homosexuality was as much a target as interracial relationships.

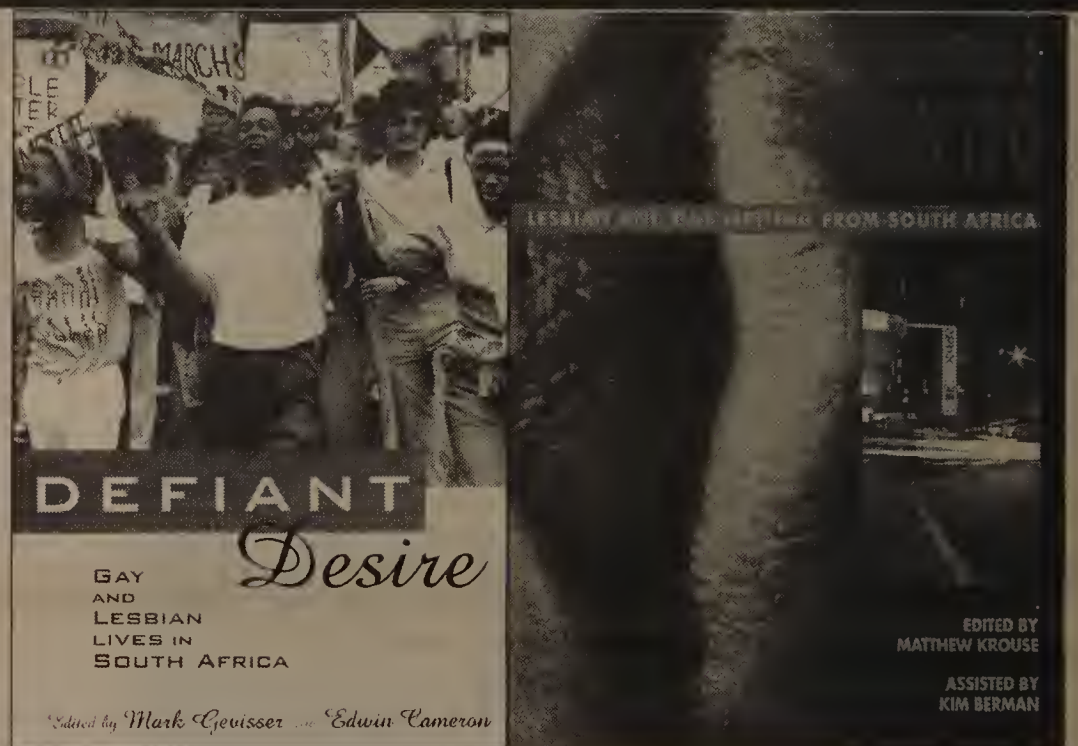
"Camp" Culture in Popular Culture

The highlight of my grandmother's year was what used to be advertised as the "Coon Carnival" (coon was the pejorative name given to "coloreds") — the "Cape Carnival," a New Year's parade through the heart of Cape Town led by a "moffie" (drag queen), bolstered by the presence of many of her sisters. My only recollection of the parade, ironically, was the appearance of large groups of "Coloreds" marching in black-face.

Defiant Desire: Gay and Lesbian Lives in South Africa, a collection of essays edited by Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron, takes up the discussion of the "moffie," now, for the first time, from gay and lesbian viewpoints. The so-called antics of "masquerade" — a term used by government officials to denounce moffie (drag) culture as clandestine and shameful despite its visible and proud culture, are illuminated in four of the essays: "A Drag at Madam Costello's," "Moffies en Manvroue," "Lesbian Gangster," and "The Arista Sisters, September 1984."

Post Apartheid: Human Rights

Thirty-years later, government denunciations are no longer official policy. South Africans have approved the most inclusive Constitutional Bill of Rights in world history. The "Equality Clause" protects persons from unfair discrimination on the basis of "race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, color, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language, and birth." During the long and violent struggle to end apartheid, South Africans came to recognize that the Declaration of Human Rights should form the foundation of their own Bill of Rights, thereby ensuring that all forms of oppression would be eliminated. Thanks to the pressure from the European community on the African National Congress (ANC) to denounce homophobia and the courageous efforts of black, gay activists like Simon Nkoli, the reconstruction of South Africa under the mythic figure of Nelson Mandela has produced a utopian model towards



which other countries, like Poland, are turning their gaze. However, it would be naive to believe that a clause in a one-hundred-and-forty page document will singularly eliminate the bigoted, patriarchal society that South Africa is. Beliefs, morals, and discriminatory thoughts and emotions remain deeply entrenched in myriad communities, and in both public and private institutions.

How Apartheid Survives

The Invisible Ghetto: Lesbian And Gay Writing From South Africa, edited by Matthew Krouse with assistance from Kim Berman, includes biographies, fiction, poetry and interviews. While the personal portraits in *The Invisible Ghetto* and *Defiant Desire* reveal a somewhat diversified gay experience, the issues most pertinent are those which illuminate the divisiveness that apartheid so successfully fostered. The apartheid hierarchy, because it was racist, sexist, classist, and Calvinist, forced people to live separately, submissively, and secretly. It was the Group Areas Act that ensured racial separation to the extent that spouses were made to live separately from each other and from their children. (Pass laws required all urban residents to be registered, and since many men were unregistered, they could not live with spouses who were domestic workers in the white areas.) Additionally, the rural areas remain ethnically more traditional, therefore more homogenous, and the majority of black South Africans live in poverty. Ironically, these very conditions allowed different groups of people to sustain strong cultural identities, even in existing gay communities.

South African culture is infinitely complex due to the racial, gender, and class hierarchy which apartheid so rigorously enforced. It did not suffice to separate and classify people by color, but also by tone, gender, and geography. *Defiant Desire* and *The Invisible Ghetto* make this complexity abundantly clear both by inclusion and omission. While the editors of the two books have attempted to ensure a diversity both in representation and style — "fact" and "fiction" — what becomes clearer by the page is that one has to analyze multiple macrocosms to be on firm enough ground to relate to the individual experience. The cultural experiences of White, Indian, Colored and Black gays and lesbians are as separate and closeted as apartheid ensured, complicated further by the official outlawing of homosexuality under Apartheid.

Both compilations were originally published in South Africa, the former by Ravan Press and the latter by the Congress of South African Writers. The inter-

Green continued from previous page

national editions were published by Routledge and The Gay Men's Press respectively. This points to a very important issue. Who is the targeted audience? The fact that The Gay Men's Press re-published *The Invisible Ghetto* reinforces the fact that women are grossly under-represented. Kim Berman's piece, "Challenging the Invisibility," contextualizes the lack of a lesbian presence and also attempts to empower lesbians to come forward and be counted. Mark Gevisser, a journalist and Edwin Cameron, now a Judge bring a more intellectual flavor to *Defiant Desire*, which is not to say that some of the writing doesn't evoke an emotional response. Matthew Krouse and Kim Berman, both artists, bring us a collection of lesbian and gay writing that is informative, educational and intensely moving — metaphor is a powerful tool — and, as an anthology of gay writing, begs the inevitable question: is there a writing aesthetic that is specifically lesbian or gay?

Gevisser's overview in "A Different Fight for Freedom," is a history of South African lesbian and gay organizations from the 1950s to the present. He opens with "Prologue: Linda Ngcobo's funeral," a story recounted in the ambiguous voice of an artist/journalist. "...In the charismatic African style of prayer, (the mourners) chanted and swayed and thumped, moving up to heaven with the force of their faith the body lying in the coffin before them. They sat, a sea of white waves, on chairs in the hall." More than two hundred of Ngcobo's gay and lesbian comrades stood behind them, "some came in jacket and tie. A few in explosive drag. A few more represented that peculiar androgyny of township drag borne of scant resources and much imagination, nodding at gender-inversion with no more than a frilly shirt, a pair of garish earrings, a touch of rouge, a pair of low-heeled pumps, a third-hand wig. Most however wore t-shirts with the GLOW [Gay and Lesbian Organization of the Witwatersrand] logo, a pink triangle framing a raised, clenched fist. For, in the township tradition of a slain freedom-fighter, this was to be a political funeral: an expression of grief that was also a consecration to further the struggle."

To this South African lesbian, 'Linda' Ngcobo's funeral poignantly summarizes the 'whole story,' the multiple issues raised in the book. Gevisser and Cameron have attempted to present myriad individual and collective experiences of South Africa's lesbian and gay community that cannot resist reflecting the division and separation instituted by apartheid. That the chronologies of experience — grouped under the headings "Where we stand," "Making space," "Making noise," and "Making waves" — resound as academic teaching reflects the backgrounds of the editors and the audience the book is intended to reach. *Defiant Desire* is forced to repeat the apartheid pyramid it so tellingly wishes to take to task; yes, there is an alarming lack of lesbian contributors; yes, the book does read as verbal map of the Group Areas Act; and, yes, gay and lesbian lifestyles are persistently heterosexist. An essay about moffie slang, "From Ada to Zelda," raises the issue of male power by the author's statement that virtually the entire vocabulary consists of female names. Like many of the pieces in *Defiant Desire*, it compels us to think more about the desire of 'males' to be 'women' and the issues of self-hatred than that of gender inequality and the hatred of women.

Gay Visibility

The Invisible Ghetto's "Tinkoncana Etimayini," "The Barracks Are Crying," and "Border Story," and *Defiant Desire's* "Abangibhamayo Bathi Ngimnandi"

South African commercial features three drag queens communicating Castrol Formula SLX engine oil's main benefit: no viscous drag.



Ad for Diesel Sunglasses taken from the South African magazine, *Style*, a Cosmopolitan-like woman's magazine.

all speak to the 'extra-sexual'/'circumstantial homosexuality' in the military, single-sex hostels for migrant laborers in the townships; and the skesana/injonga (passive/active) 'marriages' of men living on the mines. These stories, in fact, point to how insistently visible these ghettos are and were — the military publicly separating the manly men from the effeminate, and the mines encouraging a heterosexual-modeled homosexuality to ensure that 'family values' were maintained despite the absence of women and children. Reading these books reinforced the despair I experienced during a recent visit to South Africa where I witnessed the unflinching patriarchal grip on both 'straight' and gay communities.

Advertising Queer

In this new post-Apartheid society, I was struck during my last visit by the queer allusions in mass culture. A billboard of gay, African-American Olympic athlete Carl Lewis poised to start a race wearing red stilettos with the simple, relatively small text "Power is nothing without control;" between the pages of *Style Magazine* (like *Cosmopolitan*) are two femme, blonde-haired, red-lipped, white women — blouses unbuttoned — on the verge of a passionate kiss, advertising "Diesel Sunglasses;" the TV commercial for Castrol Oil—three drag queens in a flashy convertible ("Too Wong Fu, Priscilla Queen of the Desert") communicating Formula SLX's main benefit: "no viscous drag;" the article I found in the main section of the *Sunday Times* entitled "The Art Of Being Gay" begins, "The campiest thing in South Africa's first national gay and lesbian (traveling) art exhibition...is a full-length portrait of Nobel Laureate, Archbishop Desmond Tutu in all his bejeweled, High Anglican splendor...Tutu had been asked to attend the opening of the exhibit...but he couldn't make it. Instead he sent the portrait, painted by gay artist, Hayden Proud, and owned by the church, with his blessings." A black Archbishop advocating homosexual marriage.

Defiant Desire and *The Invisible Ghetto* collectively address many other issues — including media coverage, censorship of the gay press, political organizing vs. social support organizations, AIDS, butch/femme roles in lesbian relationships, and representations of homosexuality in literature. However, what is uniquely South African is the effect that apartheid had, and continues to have, on lesbian and gay society(ies). We have come so far so quickly, Bill of Rights, democracy and all. But in reading these two groundbreaking books, what materializes is how dangerous these giant leaps in South Africa's laws can be in potentially obscuring or rendering invisible the daily struggle of individuals, especially Black lesbians, to survive.

Jo-Anne Green is a South African artist who lives in Boston.

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perpetuate the rightward shift in our society and current conservative political climate.

The gay conservative movement is growing at a fast pace, and serving as an active part of the Right in attacking gay progressive institutions and liberalism in general. In the process, they have garnered a good deal of media attention. Identified with Republican politics, and at the same time loathed by its homophobic ranks, gay conservatives embody the kind of contradiction that the mainstream media thrives on. This kind of media attention clearly has costs for the gay and lesbian movement as a progressive movement. Understanding the historical roots of the gay conservative movement and its current place in the political scene is important for both assessing the damages it can do and building a gay and lesbian movement toward full human rights and liberation.

A Historical Perspective

Despite the prevailing notion that gay conservatism is a new phenomenon, the history of conservatism in the gay community dates back at least to 1953, when members of the Mattachine Society, one of the first gay liberation organizations, abandoned what historian Martin Duberman, in his book *Stonewall*, called a "startlingly radical" analysis of homosexuality and adopted an assimilationist tone. The Mattachine Society was founded in 1950 in Los Angeles by a small group of left-wing gay men who pioneered the notion that gays were a legitimate minority living within a hostile mainstream culture—indeed a radical analysis for its time. This notion fell out of favor from mid-1953 until 1969. During that time Mattachine was controlled by conservatives who were primarily interested in winning acceptance, not in challenging mainstream values.

The conservatives who wrested control of Mattachine from the left in 1953 were, like gay conservatives today, interested primarily in legal change and in being accepted by the heterosexual majority. This meant conforming to heterosexual roles. Strict dress codes were enforced at Mattachine demonstrations, a practice that today's conservatives long to return to. In the October 1994 issue of *Insight* magazine, Tafel

urged gay activists to get back to their roots, citing as part of those roots the rigid dress code of the first gay rights demonstrations, when "[m]en wore suits and women wore dresses." According to Tafel, most gays want to lead quiet professional lives in which sexual practices are a private matter. This doesn't mean they want to stay in the closet; rather, some gay conservatives say a silent confidence in being "out" represents the maturation of the gay movement.

Since the beginnings of the contemporary gay conservative movement with the defeat of the Briggs initiative, the Log Cabin Republicans went on to form chapters around the country. By 1990 nine chapters had formed, including the Chicago Area Republican Gay Group, Gay Republicans of Washington, and Republicans for Individual Freedom. In 1990 the nine clubs came together to form the Log Cabin Federation. And in 1993 the LCR national office opened in Washington, DC.

Growing Numbers

LCR claims to be the country's largest gay and lesbian partisan organization. Since the LCR national office opened in 1993 the organization has grown from 9 chapters to 58 affiliated chapters in 28 states with more than 10,000 members in 1996. By the end of 1996 LCR plans to increase to 70 clubs in 35 states. In three years their budget has more than doubled: in 1993 they had a budget of \$150-200,000 and two staff members; in 1996 they have a budget of \$500,000 and four staff members.

Many gay conservatives are Republicans, some are Democrats, and others are registered Independents. Most are white men, but small numbers of people of color and women are also active within gay conservative ranks. It should also be noted that many gay white men, for the price of remaining in the closet, have held positions of power and influence within the conservative ruling elite. In contrast, others have embraced the gay conservative ideology in order to gain power.

Though many gay men and lesbians are pro-choice, there is a small and growing group called the Pro Life Alliance of Gays and Lesbians (PLAGAL). Started in 1990 by a small group of gay men, PLAGAL has 500 members and has, in the last year, doubled from five to ten active chapters. Though PLAGAL doesn't define itself as a conservative group, like LCR, it works within a larger conservative movement—the anti-abortion movement—that is currently dominated by the political Right.

Gay conservatives include Bruce Bawer and Andrew Sullivan, as well as David Brock, author of *The Real Anita Hill*; the libertarian Cato Institute executive vice president David Boaz; W. Scott Thompson, who worked in both the Ford and Reagan administrations and details his experience as a gay neo-conservative in his memoir *The Price of Achievement: Coming Out in Reagan Days*; State Representative Chuck Carpenter (R-OR); Justin Raimondo, who has campaigned for Pat Buchanan since 1992 and is the author of *Reclaiming the American Right: The Lost Legacy of the Conservative Movement* (to which Pat Buchanan wrote the forward); Kevin Smith, Chief of Staff for Massachusetts Governor William Weld; Massachusetts Revenue Commissioner Mitchell Adams; and Michael Duffy, Commissioner of the

Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination (MCAD), whose 1990 campaign for state representative from Boston's South End is said to have brought together many gay Republicans despite the fact that Duffy lost the election to the progressive candidate Byron Rushing, a long-time friend to Boston's gay community.

While the number of people of color in gay conservative ranks is small, African American gay conservatives include: Cornelius Baker, deputy executive director for policy at the National Association of People with AIDS (NAPWA); Abner Mason, vice chair of LCR; Carolyn Handy, a longtime Republican who was a member of Reagan's transition team after his first presidential election; and Toni Young, executive director of the National Women and HIV/AIDS Project in Washington DC, who voted for both Reagan and Bush in the 1980, 1984 and 1988 elections.¹

The presence of lesbians in gay conservative ranks is minimal at best. It is unclear whether this is because most lesbians reject conservative ideas or because they object to the sexism that exists within gay conservative circles. All 19 board members of LCR are men. Staff members at LCR's Washington, DC headquarters are all (white) men, though last summer LCR hired Susan Jester as a development consultant. Tafel describes the LCR membership to be "generally white men in their 30s and 40s who live in cities."

The fact that gay conservatives have done valuable work on issues of importance to the gay and lesbian community should not go without recognition, yet poses a dilemma at the same time. For example, gay conservatives in Governor William Weld's administration were instrumental in coordinating the Massachusetts Safe Schools Program for gay and lesbian youth, the first program of its kind in the country. And one of the top priorities of LCR is the Ryan White Care Act, something they have in common with the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF), which defines itself as a progressive organization. LCR was the first gay organization to testify before the 104th Congress for funding for the Ryan White Care Act when it looked as if the Republican-controlled Congress might slash AIDS funding. However the contradiction of LCR's support for AIDS funding coupled with their support for cutting Medicaid is difficult to reconcile since the impact of Medicaid cuts on people with AIDS has a devastating effect.

Gay conservatives are also scattered on the boards of many mainstream gay and lesbian organizations. And both the Gay & Lesbian Victory Fund, which gives money to openly gay candidates running for office, and HRC have given money to Republican candidates. HRC gave \$5,000 to the Republican Congressional Campaign Committee in hopes of "encouraging moderate Republicans." But Representative Barney Frank (D-Mass) notes that all but two or three of the Republicans who benefited from this donation voted consistently to abolish Medicaid as a federally guaranteed program.

Part of the danger of gay conservatives is that they're not easily identifiable, particularly within the gay community which often denies their existence or perceives them to be a fringe group. Because gay rights are important to virtually all gay people, gay conservatives often work hand in hand

with gay progressives on both the national and local levels without ever being identified as conservative, yet effectively setting an agenda limited to gay rights as a single isolated issue. Within the gay community there is a tendency to assume that most gays are liberal when in fact, gay conservatives are scattered throughout local communities as well as national organizations. Tafel believes there are large numbers of gay conservatives who have been hesitant about identifying themselves as such because of the lack of support they anticipate getting from the gay community. But, says Tafel, with increasing numbers of gay conservatives coming out and organizing, more people are feeling comfortable about coming out as gay and identifying themselves as conservative than ever before.²

Media Visibility

Several national and regional gay publications run regular columns by gay conservatives, including *The Advocate*, Boston's weekly *Bay Windows*, and *Windy City Times* in Chicago. Bruce Bawer now writes regularly for the notoriously conservative *Wall Street Journal*. He also has written occasionally for the *New York Times* and regularly writes a column in *The Advocate*. The libertarian Cato Institute Vice President David Boaz recently had an Op-Ed in *Bay Windows*, and Marvin Liebman, though he doesn't identify as conservative anymore, had nonetheless syndicated a column in the gay press before he changed his political affiliations.

Rich Tafel and LCR have been featured on just about every major television network as well as in mainstream print media. Tafel has also written an op-ed for the *New York Times*. Stories about PLAGAL have been featured in the *Washington Post*, the *Boston Phoenix*, the *Village Voice*, *Out* magazine, and the *Washington Blade*.

With the increasing presence of gay conservatives, the face of the gay press has undergone significant changes. What used to be an advocacy press is now a professional press with mainstream aspirations that are centered around advertising. The gay press, particularly the national glossies, has successfully diversified its ad base with the help of favorable marketing surveys showing gays, and even lesbians, as having high disposable incomes. These surveys discount poor and working class gay people, yet they have been successful in attracting lucrative advertising contracts for numerous queer publications.

With new money from corporate sources, gay publications are focusing on profits and professionalism, not activism. This speaks to the need for progressive gays and lesbians to support progressive publications with progressive voices, not mainstream gay/lesbian publications which are littered with gay conservative viewpoints under the guise of professionalism and objectivity.

Electoral Politics

In the past, conservative gay men and lesbians working in the electoral sphere were often closeted. A well-known example is Terry Dolan, who was closeted when he worked as director of the National Conservative Political Action Committee (NCPAC), the organizational attack dog of the New Right in the 1980 elections. Another example is Robert Bauman, a Maryland Congressman who was charged with the criminal misdemeanor of solici-

tion for sexual purposes and lost his political office as a result.³ Yet another example is Marvin Liebman who came out in 1990, and was responsible for the formation of several right-wing groups including Young Americans for Freedom and the American Conservative Union.

In 1996, many gay Republicans have tried to play an active role in the Republican presidential primaries. In 1994, LCR raised more than \$200,000 for Republican candidates and continues, as part of its mission, to build relationships with Republicans in the House and Senate.

Gay Republicans have been effective in helping to elect several Republicans to office. Among them: California Governor Pete Wilson, Massachusetts Governor William Weld, New Jersey Governor Christine Todd Whitman, as well as Los Angeles Mayor Richard Riordan, and New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani.

Republican political consultant Roger Stone notes that although most gay political activists are Democrats, gays could become a significant factor in Republican politics if the Party hews to a libertarian line on social issues. Stone adds that the Republican Party could be a natural place for gay activists if they are willing to stick to the Republican Party's traditional role of "keeping government out of your pocket and out of your private life." And by the looks of it, gay conservatives may find a spot under the so-called big tent of the Republican Party, given their conservative views on immigration, welfare, defense, economics, and government.

In a direct mail fundraising appeal LCR states that they "adamantly oppose affirmative action and were the only gay group to enthusiastically endorse the Contract With America." The Contract was notable for its avoidance of controversial social issues such as gay rights and abortion. Unlike progressive gay organizations, which denounced the Contract With America for its cuts in welfare and Medicaid, LCR praised it. "In contrast to the 1992 Republican platform, the contract sharply focused on the most critical issues facing our country and offered solid Republican solutions, avoiding divisive issues like abortion and anti-gay rhetoric that needlessly drive wedges between the many parts of the majority coalition," wrote Rich Tafel in a *New York Times* op-ed.

What Tafel and other gay Republicans offer the GOP is a compromise: Say nothing pro or con and stick to economics. "That's a formula sure to win half of the gay vote away from the Democrats," says Tafel. Indeed exit polls after the 1994 election, which overturned the Democratic Congress, showed that 34 percent of voters who identified themselves as gay said they had voted Republican.⁴ In 1992, only 17 percent of those who identified themselves as gay had voted Republican.⁵ But many fewer gays voted in 1994.

Yet, the 1994 increase for the GOP may suggest both that more gays are coming out within the Republican Party, and that with the increased visibility of gay Republicans, more gay conservatives feel comfortable admitting that they voted Republican. Either way, the statistics are dramatic when compared to voter statistics of other populations traditionally identified as liberal-leaning. For example, the Times Mirror Group notes that a greater percentage of gay voters voted Republican than did Jewish voters.

Multi-Culturalism & Queer Culture

Gay conservatives consistently demonstrate that they hold negative stereotypes about gay culture. Gay communities understand themselves as sexual communities, and have spawned a range of sexual subcultures. Sexuality is given public, symbolic meanings within many sectors of gay culture, whereas mainstream, heterosexist culture imagines sexuality to be the private matter of individuals. Gay conservatives cannot tolerate the sexually explicit aspects of gay culture - their relationship to being gay does not allow for the sexual practices and gender expressions of gay people to be celebrated. Thus, gay conservatives assume a stance of superiority over and disdain for the parts of the gay community which they choose not to identify with, identifying instead with heterosexist culture and mimicking the homophobia of the right wing. Their rejection of gay culture is apparent in the descriptions of it in their written work, especially personal biographies, and in interviews.⁶

Lifestyle diversity within the gay and lesbian community is particularly problematic for gay conservatives, especially in regard to drag queens and others who are either not interested in assimilating into a hostile mainstream culture, or cannot assimilate because they are unable to pass for straight. In his book, *A Place at the Table*, Bruce Bawer writes about his dismay at a New York City Pride parade: "It seemed as if people who wore suits and ties on the 364 other days of the year had, on this particular morning, ransacked their closets for their tackiest, skimpiest, most revealing items of clothing. There were hundreds of bare chests, bare bottoms, mesh pants, nipple rings, leather shorts, and tight designer briefs without anything covering them."⁷

Bawer complains that such "extreme" behavior has "helped to spread among heterosexuals an appalling and profoundly distorted image of homosexuality." He argues that it is this behavior that has contributed to the difficulty in convincing heterosexuals that nothing about homosexuality is intrinsically contrary to their values. This view he would argue is not a matter of self-loathing, since gays like him do not see this aspect of the gay community as related to their lives. By isolating themselves from explicit gay culture, they remain gay activists, but representing and advocating for only a segment of the gay community.

Gay conservatives' arguments against diversity go beyond the gay sex culture to issues of multiculturalism. Bruce Bawer criticizes New York's Rainbow Curriculum controversy in 1992. "In point of fact there was much to dislike in the Rainbow Curriculum: it didn't just promote tolerance, it promoted a multicultural mindset. Instead of encouraging children to judge one another as individuals, it sought to reinforce their awareness of differences, to think of one another as belonging to this or that group."⁸ Bawer's argument is strikingly similar to mainstream right-wing arguments that attack multiculturalism for undermining the traditional American values that derive from "our European roots." Instead of honoring the many differences that exist in a pluralistic society and that are part of our rich histories, the Right longs for a "color blind" society. In the current distribution of political and economic power, the enshrinement of the "color blind"

continued on next page

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society preserves the privilege of white males. When combined with the widespread anti-immigrant position of many gay conservatives, the evidence of their racism accumulates.

The Impact Of Gay Conservatives

The appearance of gay conservatives in growing numbers within the gay liberation movement is not an anomaly. Social change movements, whose driving purpose and goal is to empower a sector of society that has been excluded, silenced, or disdained by the larger society, often begin with a unity born of shared oppression and a shared vision. Success in achieving that vision opens the door to compromise and division within the movement itself. A taste of acceptance and increased access to power brings out the stratification within the movement that exists within the larger society. Those most able to "take" the power not previously available to them are less and less likely to see themselves in solidarity with those who remain marginal and critical of the larger society. The phenomenon of "selling out" is well known to social change movements.

Further, as the Right becomes more powerful, it seems its rhetoric has come to influence the entire society, even communities that have been the target of right-wing attacks. Growing numbers of gay people see themselves as part of the mainstream, and are therefore open to messages that appeal to the mainstream. They are able to be convinced, as others within the mainstream have been, that people of color, or immigrants, or welfare recipients, or government bureaucrats, or butch lesbians, or drag queens are the problem. Because gay conservatives do not identify with those who are the object of that intolerance, they feel no political responsibility for them. By effectively scapegoating these people, gay conservatives are simply melding in with the general rightward drift of the larger society. The impact on the gay and lesbian movement is to move it to the right, into a tighter collaboration with the forces that pursue power by creating scapegoats and promoting intolerance.

There is an important debate emerging in the gay liberation movement about the roots of the movement and its grounding political ideology and vision. For gay conservatives, the roots of the movement lie in the vision of conservative gay activists who struggled for acceptance and admission to the larger society. For progressive gay and lesbian activists, the struggle has been for equal rights for gay and lesbian people and for all excluded people. This vision leads to solidarity with other movements—the civil rights movement, the women's movement, the disability rights movement, and the welfare rights movement, for example—and a suspicion of the political establishment that historically has been hostile to our community's very existence.

The struggle within the gay and lesbian movement is, in many ways, a struggle between the vision of conditional acceptance and that of actual liberation. It is little wonder that the vision of conditional acceptance for gay and lesbian people is flourishing in the current political climate of punitive intolerance.

Surina Khan is an Associate Analyst at Political Research Associates. This article is a revised and shorter version of one published in the Spring, 1996 issue of *The Public Eye*, a publication of Political Research Associates.

less sister for her to take the unborn girl. Throughout we see the child's mother's subtle, if ineffective, efforts to change her husband's decision, all to no avail.

Perhaps the most subtle and finely rendered story in the collection is Samuel Delany's *Citre et Trans*, the work that closes the collection. It has become almost clichéd to marvel over Delany's tight, powerful prose, his deeply complex characterization, or his subtly engaging plots. Still, *Citre et Trans*, a work that details the adventures of a young, Black American expatriate in Greece as he makes his way through a world criss-crossed by differences of race, sex, sexuality, nationality and class is simply marvelous. The story comes to a climax as he is raped by two Greek soldiers who have been brought home by his sexually insatiable English roommate. One of the sailors later spots him on the street, apologizes, then offers him a cheap knife in recompense. The protagonist then masturbates as he remembers the scene, throwing into confusion our preconceptions about the proper response of the victim of sexual violence. "I did it first with fear, then with a committed anger, determined to take something from them, to retrieve some pleasure from what, otherwise, had been just painful, just ugly." The story closes as our protagonist reads a note from a German friend, Heidi, as she relates—in detail—the mechanics of killing her dog, Pharaoh, whom she decides to drown instead of leaving him to be abused in what has been described regularly as a virulently anti-canine Greece. Indeed the note leaves the reader with a stinging sensation as one becomes trapped within the moral quandary produced by the dog's death. Should she leave the animal to fend for itself, or kill it as she has done?

Shade proves to be a wonderful reading experience. All of the essays are well written, some demonstrating unique intellect and talent. Look out for Bennett Capers whose "Nobody Gets Hurt" is both sweet and frightening. Get your hands on anything by John Keene whose prose in "My Son, My Heart, My Life" demonstrates breathtaking poise and control. Treat yourself to Robert E. Penn's "Uncle Eugene," a story that shuttles effortlessly between humor and tragedy. Laugh out loud at Bil Wright's "Your Mother From Cleveland," a deceptively simple examination of loss and community. And remember that this work, *Shade*, is but the latest in a long and distinguished list of Black gay male fiction. It is but one marker on a road that still lies before us.

Robert Reid-Pharr is a writer and cultural activist who teaches in the English Department at Johns Hopkins University.

Khan Footnotes

¹ See Sidney Brinkley, "Party of Lincoln," *The Washington Blade*, August 18, 1995.

² Author's interview with Rich Tafel.

³ See Robert Bauman, *The Gentleman from Maryland*, p. 2.

⁴ *U.S. News & World Report*, September 1995.

⁵ *U.S. News & World Report*, May 29, 1995.

⁶ See Bruce Bawer, *A Place at the Table*; Marvin Liebman, *Coming Out Conservative*; Robert Bauman, *The Gentleman from Maryland*; W. Scott Thompson, *The Price of Achievement*.

⁷ *A Place at the Table*, p. 155.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.64

example, and realize we have a natural commonality of interests across issues like employment discrimination, sexual violence, hate crimes, and medical care. We need to stop looking for our own little slice of identity pie.

The experience of having gay identity teaches you very profound lessons about outsiderdom. If you really understand that lesson how can you only stand for your right to be gay? If you cannot make the connection that this happens to others then I don't think you've learned very much from the oppression that you've experienced.

There is a machinery that takes groups which do not fit the norm and inflicts violence upon them. It squeezes them out to the margins and flushes them out to the bottom of the system economically. It has done this reliably with one kind of minority after another. If you don't try to dismantle the larger machine, then it just goes ahead and does the same thing with another group. I don't mean to argue that all oppressions are interchangeable. They each have distinctive features but there's also a tremendous commonality.

Within one month in New York City, I've been harassed as a dyke, as a faggot, as a sex change and as a bitch. Unless I have four different people running around inside of my skin that experience tells me there is a commonality to these oppressions. We need to be engaged in fighting all of them.

Isa: Has your own activism employed a function-based approach?

Riki: The transgender movement is not about trying to cement and valorize yet one more marginalized people, leaving behind some smaller minority, like the intersexed, to wage their own struggle. It's not just about those minorities whom Kate Bornstein called "transgressively gendered," those identities inevitably corralled in the old gender binary zoo: the radical fairies, fag hags, the diesel dykes, transsexuals, transvestites, cross-dressers.

The transgender movement is also about the 17-year old Midwestern cheerleader who ruins her health with anorexia because "real women" are supposed to be supernaturally thin. It's also about the Joe SixPack who wraps his car around a school bus on the way back from the bar because "real men" are supposed to be "heavy drinkers." It's about an aging body, that suffers through a wholly unnecessary hysterectomy because certain kinds of gendered bodies just don't count as much. It's also about a young man who is repeatedly gang raped his first year in prison because within that environment he is perceived as a gender queer or gender vulnerable. Those are all examples of gender-based oppression. I organize around the function of that oppression, not an essentialized identity. I'm not at all interested in waging a struggle for trans identity. That's why the Gender PAC is dedicated to gender, affectional and racial equality.

Isa: Yet The Menace's actions that focus on trans inclusion (like adding the transgender name to the Stonewall 25 logo) are inspired by an identity-based approach.

Riki: They do. I think that part of the problem is that we have limited resources and that's an area in which almost no one is doing any work. That's a problem. If someone from another group gets killed, there's an outcry. If a transgender prostitute gets killed, this person is (considered) disposable. We end up doing actions that are more around trans-identified people because those are the ones that no one's looking at.

But we are looking for actions around other kinds of oppressions which are also uncovered. The Menace doesn't need to be doing something that 15 queer groups are already working on. Were looking for (groups and issues) that are not drawing any attention, like Stop Prison Rape, that we think are in line with our goals.

This is all new territory, which flows directly from the work of Judith Butler. To my knowledge, she has never talked about putting her work into direct action. And I've never heard anybody else try it. Every group that I know of has more or less organized around identity and a particular class of individuals. For me it's a real experiment.

All in the Family

Isa: What are the underlying causes of transphobia in the queer movement?

Riki: There are a lot of queers who are afraid of being queer. It's a shame, but the truth is that the people who are the most straight looking get the most power at the soonest possible moment. As a result, there is a tendency to try to disenfranchise those who are queer in the wider sense.

It used to be that gay people said to the straight world that we will not go straight until you go gay. In the 1980s that message transmogrified into "gay is as good as straight." At that precise moment, the gay movement lost its radical potential and became just another 'me too' movement. And so instead of trying to remember Audre Lorde's dictum that the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house, we have instead become content to merely try to build a small but tastefully furnished addition out back.

I need to underscore this is not any different in the trans community. For example, some straight white male cross dressers say, "I'm not a homosexual, I

have nothing to do with them, don't use the word queer about me. I just like to try on a dress now and then." They've got to be kidding. I tell them, "When they beat you up on the street, they're gonna call you a fag. Are you going to explain to the basher that you're just a straight white guy who has a wife and two kids and likes to wear dresses occasionally?"

Isa: Some of your opponents assert that a rejection of the gender binary invalidates their identity. For example, some transsexuals feel very strongly identified to one gender. Gay and lesbian identity is also largely dependent on the existence of this gender binary. How do you respond to this criticism?

Riki: There's a lot of truth to that. A lot of people look at the claims of post-modernism or even post-identity politics and they feel a void opening up at their feet. If I am not x, what am I? If one literally follows Judith Butlers injunctions, let the categories flow free and let the boundaries be porous, what does this mean? This is a problem.

I have found that the gay community at large feels that letting in trans people will deprive them of their identity. But no one's saying you shouldn't identify that way. Were just saying you shouldn't essentialize that identity. I don't think when God looks down God sees gay people and straight people or white people and Black people. I don't think that dogs see us that way. There's a litmus, if a weiner dog doesn't see you as a trans person, it's not a real identity.

HRC/ENDA

Isa: Opponents to trans inclusion of ENDA (Employment Non-Discrimination Act) claim that the bill's sexual orientation provisions already protect you. Why do you disagree with that claim?

Riki: Let's say that I am a butch lesbian and I show up at work in a three piece suit and a tie. They can still fire me because that is considered to be an expression of gender. They can say, "We thought she was married with kids. This is not about her being gay. We consider showing up in a suit and tie to be totally inappropriate."

I'm always interested in the argument that sexual preference is different from gender expression and is not part of gender oppression. I looked this one gay man in the eye and said, "excuse me, are you trying to tell me that inserting a penis into your body is not a fully gendered act which is reserved and regulated onto female bodies? It seems to me that inserting a penis into your mouth or any orifice is a fully gendered act that is reserved for only female bodies."

And if we take the other end, there is an enormous underground community of millions of people who are your average straight white cross-dressers. No one is speaking to their issues at all. In some ways they are more empowered because they can hide. In other ways they are the most disempowered because it's possible to maybe keep your job if you are a gay person or transsexual. It's impossible to keep your job if you're a cross dresser.

Occasionally, at work, people try to be friendly and ask, "When did you get your surgery?" They have a nice expectant look in their eye. So I say, "Surgery, smurgery, I just really get off on wearing women's clothing." And all of a sudden their faces fall off because I've slid from being a nice trans person to being a sex pervert who probably has an erection right then at that moment.

Isa: Given the current hostile rightwing climate on Capital Hill, do you think trans inclusion would actually hurt ENDA's chances of passing?

Riki: I understand the demands of real politics. I would have been personally less distressed had the powers that be made a last ditch do or die effort for trans inclusion and then said, "Look we can't do it. It's not going to happen, let us off the hook." But that's not what happened. I think we were looking for at least a good faith effort [instead of] being left by the wayside a priori.

Isa: In March, HRC Executive Director Elizabeth Birch testified on behalf of adding transgendered people to the Hate Crimes Statistics Act (HCSA), which is under review for renewal. Does this mark a truce between The Menace and HRC?

Riki: We are pleased that HRC has come around to be more trans inclusive and in working closer with the trans community. However, there is a lot of ground that needs to be covered. We look forward to working with them on this.

HRC has already extended their boundaries a bit. But I don't think we are more legitimated yet within HRC's normal scope of activities except ENDA and Hate Crimes, about which we have specifically asked them. I look forward to the day when HRC, like NGLTF, starts to look at the larger queer community as that which it is chartered to serve. And I think in order to do that, they're going to have to look seriously at redefining their mission to include bi people, s/m people, drag-identified people and trans people and not just those who identify as gay or lesbian. NGLTF has already made great strides in that direction. I think HRC needs to follow in that same vein.

Isa Leshko is the Books Editor for Sojourner: The Women's Forum and an editor of Planet Q (<http://planetq.com>).

GCN Prisoner Pen Pal Requests

These requests are in addition to those printed in the February 1996 issue of GCN.

GWM, 28 years old, blond/blue, 183 pounds, 5' 10", HIV-, hairless body, clean face, broad shoulders. Seeks: sincere, supportive, caring and loving person to correspond with. Available for possible relationship with loving, caring supportive sugar-daddy.

Gregory Wilson #502346
Potosi Corr. Ctr.
Rt. 2 Box 2222
Mineral Point, MO 63660

38 years old, male to female, lesbian TS seeks bi or lesbian lady for friendship and relationship (must understand that S.R.S. not done yet). Must be loving and caring.

Miz. MaryKay L. Condit, #53124
P.O. Box 10000 LCF
Limon, CO 80826

26 years old, WM. blond/blue, 5' 10", 170 pounds, body builder, HIV+. Hoping to correspond with someone who is white, Latino, Italian or American Indian. I like surfing, pool and travel. Drug free, healthy, due for release this year.

Blaine Dorsey, #H-11670
480 Alta Rd.
San Diego, CA 92179

31 year old, BM, Masculine, enjoys, chess, computers, and calligraphy. A possessive, dominant lover, I am also sincere and attentive. Will respond to all. Willing to be completely dedicated and feminine.

Vernon Beal
Box 538
Jefferson City, MO 65102

GWM, 30 years old, 6 feet, 175 pounds, blond hair/blue eyes, is seeking gay/lesbian pen pals of all ages and interests. I have numerous interests, including art, antiquities, travel, books, and sharp witty individuals. Anxious to meet new and diverse friends.

Beauregard Blevins, #624563
P.O. Box 16
Lovelady, TX 75851

33 year old, female bisexual looking to start meaningful relationship and friendships through correspondence. I am fun, loving, honest, open minded, loyal. Looking to relocate in the future. Please no correspondence from other correctional institutions.

Please don't respond if you're not sincere! Very outspoken and experienced is several avenues. In search of soul mate, is that you? Respond!

Stephanie Singleton, #0C6323
P.O. Box 180
Muncy, PA 17756

WM inmate adult looking for mature friendship.

Donald Lloyd, #3718
Maine State Prison
Thomaston, ME 04861

GWM, 31 years old, 6'3", 185 pounds, in search of that FREAKY special one. I have no boundaries. Especially interested in older Black males.

Brian R. Spruill
P.O. Box 999
Clinton, NC 28329

The stud master, GWM, 43 year old, 6' 2", 197 pounds. Goes up for parole next year, seeks sissy TV, TS, GM, bottoms. Send photo if possible. No prisoners please. AAA

Tom Blankenship
19152 Manford Rd.
Lucasville, OH 45699

33 year old, sophisticated, intelligent, open-minded, Black man seeking companionship with same characteristics for friendship or relationship.

Brett E. Etter, #D94240
P.O. Box 8501 FB-B5-116U
Coalina, CA 93210

18 year old, lonely, gay white boy, 5' 6", 130 pounds, seeking father figures, friends, and possibly lover. Hobbies: outdoors, hunting, fishing, computers, shopping, among other things. I love attention. I can not write other prisoners, serious pen pals only.

Derek Clouse, #510633
Potosi Correctional Center
RR 2, Box 2222 (3-B-39)
Potosi, MO 63660

Handsome honey-brown-skinned, college-educated, sensitive and varied interested man, incarcerated on minor offense, needs letters from anyone who wants honest friendship and likes to write.

Marvin Miller, #281-424
P.O. Box 511
Cols., OH 43216

Interested in gay guys who are serious about establishing a healthy relationship. Age 30 and up who know how to treat a real man. I'm doing a 5 year sentence that will expire next year. I'm 27, single, and I love to travel and listen to classical rock-n-roll. I am also drug free.

Mr. Byron Ellis, #638182
Route 2, P.O. Box 4400
Gatesville, TX 76597

5' 8", 154 pounds, 39 years old, brown eyes, brown hair with a grey streak. Seeking white or Mexican men to correspond with. I have done 29 months of a 10 year sentence.

Jeffrey Lee Pruitt, Sr., #698742-E4-49
Boyd Unit
Route 2, Box 500
League, TX 75860-9802

"The End of Alice" is my type of book! If you read this and you liked it, write me. We have something in common. I would also like to hear from "Bob C." out of Ohio. It's been a long time.. or anyone else who would like to write this 33 year old Latin lover for some fun, open-minded and uninhibited correspondence. I will answer all! I am 5' 11", 190 pounds, brown hair, brown eyes, reddish-brown mustache. Please respond to:

Marty Lomas, #C58984
SHU/D3/218-L
P.O. Box 7500
Crescent City, CA 95532

Looking for an open-minded, understanding gay/bisexual or lesbian pen pal. I'm 6' 0", 203 pounds, light complexioned, Black stud. Brown eyes, short black hair, fully built gentleman. I'm bisexual, lonely and single. I love dancing, poetry and people of any race or gender. Will respond to all. Willing to exchange photos.

Mitchell Taylor, #20867
N.H.S.P.
P.O. Box 14
Concord, NH 03301-0014

5' 2", 167 pounds, death row inmate. Looking for pen pal to share letters and friendship. I'm a good man, enjoy art work, and learning English. I draw and read a lot.

Guillermo Arbelaez, #122079
43-1166 A-1, U.C.I., Box 221
Raiford, FL 32083

28 year old, 180 pounds. I will be released some time this year and am looking for someone to correspond with for friendship. I am especially interested in someone familiar with the Boston area.

Keith Tlemeyer, #637699
Route 4, Box 1100
Rosharon, TX 77583

Lonely, incarcerated gay male seeking friends and/or possible relationship. 38 years old, 5' 8", 190 pounds, muscular build, French/Cherokee. Please write and let's smile together.

Rob Lowe, #154969
Unit-MSU
Delaware Correctional Center
Smyrna, DE 19977

—Tired of being alone— 25 year old, 5' 9", 170 pounds, firmly built, attractive and intelligent, compassionate and caring GBM. Seeking feminine GM (age and race unimportant) for life-long commitment. Willing to relocate upon my release in 11 months. SERIOUS REPLIES ONLY. Photo appreciated.

Troy L. Brunson, #R147-755
SOCCF
P.O. Box 45699
Lucasville, OH 45699-0001

WGM, 28 year old, looking for friendships with anyone who is willing. I have poetry. Any race or age. I love all people. Will answer all.

Steven Rivet, #1146, #1387
Avon Park Correctional Institute
P.O. Box 1100
Avon Park, FL 33825

Lifer in search of encouragement, entertainment and friendship if someone is full of energy and has time to give. I am a Black male, 32 years old, 5' 8".

R.M. Cartwright, #56237
Arizona State Prison
SMU II 1-C-37
P.O. Box 3400
Florence, AZ 85232

I am 31, 195 pounds, sandy long, blond hair.

Dave Rowe, #204431
Alger Max. Correctional Facility
P.O. Box 600
Munising, MI 49862

27 years old, gay Hispanic male, 5' 10", black hair and eyes, have tattoos. Bottom or top. Like men of all ages. Looking to find someone through correspondence. To be released in 12 months. Will send pictures.

Menejildo Ramos, #612349
Route 1, Box 150
Tenn Colony, TX 75884

Seeking a list of gay or alternative papers in the San Francisco, Boston, Seattle, Cambridge, New York, Hartford and Baltimore to assist in relocating after release. Also seeking list of halfway houses.

Brian Sudduth
Route 4, Box 1100
Rosharon, TX 77583

SWM, 29 seeks sincere and true friends! I am caring, sincere, and a personal fitness trainer who is very open-minded. Let me hear about and from you.

William Poirier, #718440, B-63
Jackson Correctional Institution
Malone, FL 32445

Non-fiction writer seeking to correspond with other writers and exchange work.

Kenneth Goodson, #060418
P.O. Box 9561
Wilmington, DE 19809

White 40 year old, 6' 2", brown hair and eyes, outgoing, would love to meet people. Love to cook and to let others name places to go when in the free world. I go by the name "Buster."

Thomas M. Foster, #438843
9601 spur 591
Amarillo, TX 79107-9606

Well-educated professional due for release in a few years is seeking female pen pals.

Thomas S. Kang (Dorm 6, #26)
Southeastern Correctional Center
12 Administration Road
Bridgewater, Ma 02324

GM, 6' 1", 168 pounds, blue eyes, brown hair. Always ready for fun. Seeks pen pals.

Kevin Caldwell, #935484
P.O. Box 1111-BH 2058
Carlisle, IN 47838

WGM, 30 years old, 5' 9", 150 pounds. I would truly appreciate correspondence from other gay males.

Gregory Johanningmeier
705 West Main
Decorah, IA 52101

37 year old, bisexual BM, serving 5 years, due for release next year. I would greatly appreciate writing to someone to express my hobbies and sexual desires.

William Nesbitt, #034032
5400 Batline Drive, L-215B
Panama City, FL 32404

Blue-eyed, long blond hair, Queen. Seeks letters. You must be open, proud and love hot mail.

Diane Johnson, # 174303
P. O. Box 1000
Craigs ville, VA 24430

33 year old GWM, passive bottom, looking to hear from well hung tops. Want to establish serious long-term relationship to result in marriage/ life partnership.

Dale Leech, # 933467
Unit 5- wing F-27
Washington State Penitentiary
P.O. Box 520
Walla Walla, WA 99362-0520

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HC01
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35 year old male looking for friends to write, both lesbian and gay prisoners welcomed.

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#517-764-4240
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EG-208786
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Reidsville, GA 30499

47 year old male, seeks correspondence with interesting people of all backgrounds. Particular interests are politics, travel and cultures of the U.S. and world and almost any Jeopardy category. After 12 years, I long to know real people.

Dave Jones, # 14474
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Rawlins, WY 82301

Bisexual male interested in corresponding with women, transvestites, or transsexuals.

John Beale, #W57470
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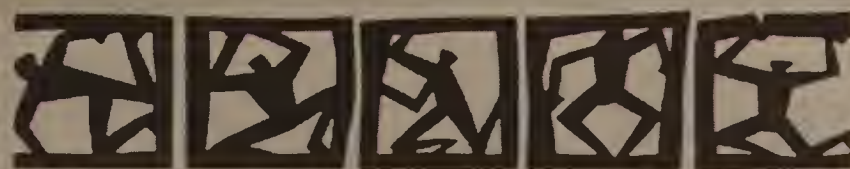
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